

OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL  
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# CONTESTED HIERARCHIES

*A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste  
in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*



*Edited by*  
DAVID N. GELLNER AND  
DECLAN QUIGLEY



CLARENDON PRESS OXFORD

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1995

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The urban civilization of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley provides a paradigm for the study of caste and Hindu kingship. In this innovative study six anthropologists, in a genuinely collaborative international endeavour, pool their knowledge of the three ancient royal cities of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, and the nearby settlements which once formed part of their respective kingdoms.

*Contested Hierarchies* opens with an introduction outlining the historical background and contemporary context of Newar society. In the central chapters of the book the social institutions of all the main caste groups—Hindu and Buddhist priests, patrons, artisans, farmers, and low castes—are given extended consideration. A comparative conclusion, which locates controversies about the Newars within wider theoretical debates over the nature of caste, demonstrates how the fundamental principles underlying all caste systems are particularly clearly exemplified by the Newar case.

Themes to emerge from the entire work include: the coexistence of competing representations of caste hierarchies; the importance of kingship and the symbolism of the exemplary centre; the relationship between the Hindu royal city and the villages in its hinterland; the salience of territorial affiliation, ties of kinship, and access to the services of ritual specialists as markers of identity and status; and the far-reaching social changes which have occurred in recent decades. Throughout *Contested Hierarchies* the contributors demonstrate the social and cultural continuities between India and Nepal.

The result is the most complete and rounded analysis yet of a regional caste system. This book, attractively illustrated by specially chosen black and white photographs, should appeal not only to students of Hinduism and South Asia, but to all anthropologists and comparative sociologists interested in the interrelations of politics, ritual, kinship, economy, and ideology in complex pre-industrial societies.

Jacket illustration: A high-caste Śreṣṭha elder of Satungal in trance while carrying an old sword during the Mohani (Np. Dasai) festival. He is supported by two members of his lineage. Photo by H. Ishii.

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## PREFACE

This volume grew from our conviction that Newar society and culture were so complex as to be approached best in co-operation with other scholars. This is not a conference volume; it is not the hopeful juxtaposition of diverse papers that the authors happened to have ready at a particular moment. Rather, each contributor was asked to address the same questions from the point of view of their particular ethnographic expertise and the result is a genuinely co-operative venture. Even where contributors disagree, this is a fertile difference over the interpretation of the same material.

The main focus of the book is the description and analysis of caste, kinship, and other forms of social organization among the Newars. We believe that this particular example of caste society should be of interest to students of South Asia in general, for reasons outlined in Chapters 1 and 10. In order to challenge preconceived ideas about caste societies, the chapters are not arranged in imitation of a single linear order from bottom to top or top to bottom. The spatial organization of Newar cities suggests, rather, a centre-periphery model. Since books have to be read in some order, we have arranged the chapters in two sections: after the introduction (Ch. 1) Chapters 2 to 5 deal with patron and agriculturalist castes. Then Chapters 6 to 9 describe castes that have specialized priestly and/or artisanal functions, one of the most important of which is the removal of pollution. Chapter 10 provides a more theoretical conclusion.

We have accumulated many debts in the writing of this book. In the first place we must thank those Newars who permitted us to pry into the intimate details of their social life, matters which they frequently dislike revealing to outsiders and the revelation of which will lead to no immediate or obvious benefit to them. None the less, this book will, we hope, be of interest to educated Newars who are much concerned with the issues discussed herein.

Our second debt of gratitude is to the other contributors to this volume, for being willing to collaborate in the co-operative enterprise of describing and analysing Newar society. The chapters by Gérard Toffin were originally written in French. Chapter 6 was translated by Gellner and Chapter 8 by Quigley; both translations were checked by the author.

Over the years we have been helped by many people in Nepal; specific debts are listed at the beginning of each chapter of the book. We would particularly like to thank Niels Gutschow for allowing us to use the maps which appear as Figs. 2 and 11. In addition, we would like to thank Brigitte Amthor, Dor Bahadur Bista, Dilli Ram Dahal, Naresh Gurung, the late Prem Bahadur Kansakar, K. P. Malla, M. C. Regmi, Prayag Raj Sharma, Shukra and Uttam Sagar Shrestha, Malla K. Sundar, Nirmal Man Tuladhar, Subarna Man Tuladhar, Paloma Verdegay, and Emil Wendel. Chris Pinney and A. W.

Macdonald read through the entire manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. We would also like to thank the Centre for Nepalese and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, which acted as the host institution while we were engaged in fieldwork. This research was only possible because HMG, and in particular the Ministries of Education and Home Affairs, graciously provided us with research visas.

We would like to thank the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust. Each of us held a Leverhulme Study Abroad Studentship and then a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship (though never at the same time). Without the generous support of these two institutions our research on Nepal would never have happened and this book would never have been written.

Last, but not least, we would like to acknowledge our gratitude to the copy-editor, Heather Watson, the desk-editor, Janet Moth, the series editor, Peter Momtchiloff, and his assistant editor, Jenni Scott, and all those at Oxford University Press who have been responsible for seeing the book through to publication.

D.N.G., D.Q.

*March 1994*

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*Declan Quigley* is Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the Queen's University of Belfast, N. Ireland. After taking his Ph.D. at the London School of Economics in 1984, he carried out post-doctoral research in Kathmandu while attached to Tribhuvan University. He subsequently undertook research and lectured at the University of Cambridge until 1992 when he returned to his native city. He has published a number of articles on the Newars and a comparative, theoretical book: *The Interpretation of Caste* (1993).

*Gérard Toffin* is a Director of Research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Meudon, France, and is the head of the research team investigating 'Milieux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya'. He specialized in the anthropology of Nepal in 1970 after studying at the Sorbonne and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (ÉHÉSS) in Paris. His work in Nepal has been particularly on two groups: the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley and the Tamangs in the west of the country. He is the author of numerous works on the anthropology of Nepal and the Himalayas including *Société et religion chez les Néwar du Népal* (1984) and *Le Palais et le temple* (1994).

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## NOTE ON CONVENTIONS AND TRANSLITERATION

In this book we adopt the same conventions for the spelling and transliteration of Newari words as were used in Gellner (1992: xxi–xxii, 35–8). The only exception is that both *candrabindu* and *anusvara* over a vowel are represented by the tilde (~).

In brief, this means that the spellings of Manandhar's (1986) Newari–English dictionary are followed, except in the case of Sanskrit-derived words, which are given in their more widely recognized Sanskritic form, as most educated Newars themselves write them. For Nepali words, we have followed the Royal Nepal Academy's standard dictionary of Nepali (Pokharel *et al.* 1983). In the transliteration of Newari words, 'b' and 'w' have been used where appropriate, except that 'v' has been used for Sanskrit-derived terms.

The usual South Asianist convention has been adopted whereby English caste names are capitalized: a Farmer is a man (or woman) of the Maharjan caste; anyone can be a farmer. As in Quigley (1993), the names of the four *varṇas* have been given in italics. Where the term 'Brāhmaṇ' is used, it refers to a specific caste.

The detailed index is intended to function as a glossary, with key defining references for technical terms shown in italics. Abbreviations used for kin terms are listed in the appendix. Nw. = Newari, Np. = Nepali.

# Introduction

*David N. Gellner*

## *1. Three Reasons for Studying the Newars*

Caste has always fascinated foreign observers of South Asia.<sup>1</sup> Yet social anthropologists of the region only turned away from an overriding concern with tribal peoples after the Second World War, beginning with Srinivas's classic *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952). Numerous monographs followed, culminating in Louis Dumont's impressive synthesis, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (first published in French in 1966, in English in 1970, and a complete revised English edition in 1980). *Homo Hierarchicus* quickly came to dominate the field and to represent it to non-specialists. Subsequently, however, many South Asianists have come to think that its influence has been too great.<sup>2</sup>

Some have even gone so far as to conclude that interest in caste has been not only excessive, but almost invariably pathological. It is argued that previous writers on caste were motivated by a desire to see South Asians as entirely distinct from Europeans or north Americans, as exemplifying the worst alternative to Occidental individualism. Writings on caste, it is claimed, lent themselves to the legitimation of British dominance, and of Western cultural hegemony in general. For South Asia this position has been taken most visibly and eloquently by Ronald Inden in his *Imagining India* (1990), which explicitly takes its lead from Said's *Orientalism* (1978). *Imagining India* has a broad range and makes many telling points, but it also exemplifies the very sins of lack of empathy and selection of evidence to fit an a priori ideological scheme, which it claims to identify in past writings on South Asia. Such auto-exemplification of sins others are castigated for, is, as Hobart remarks (1990: 305–6), a common feature of would-be iconoclastic anthropology. To my mind, Inden does not convincingly show, but merely asserts, that in the works he parades for our derision South Asians are necessarily viewed as passive victims of caste or 'the Indian mind'.

Unlike Inden and some others, the present collection does not attempt a complete epistemological break with previous Western or South Asian

scholarship on caste and other aspects of social organization, but aims rather to build on it. We believe we are well placed to do so for three main reasons: (1) because Nepal is the last Hindu kingdom in South Asia and preserves patterns of social organization once far more prevalent; (2) because the Kathmandu Valley is a small cultural region: this makes it feasible for a team of ethnographers to cover all the main caste groups within it; (3) because the Kathmandu Valley contains both cities *and* villages: it is therefore possible to avoid the rural bias of most anthropological work on caste.

In the analysis of inter-caste relationships and the role of the modern state, a less extreme, and more carefully argued, case than Inden's was made some time ago by C. J. Fuller in an article entitled 'British India or Traditional India? An Anthropological Problem' (Fuller 1977). Fuller showed that, because they ignored historians' evidence about systems of land tenure in the pre-British period, anthropologists had wrongly assumed the social systems they studied to be 'traditional'—i.e. ancient—when they were in fact the product of the British period.

The wider conclusion, then, is that the archetypal 'traditional' village, with its *jajmani* system and local political structure centred on the dominant caste, is not traditional at all, but was . . . mainly a creation of the British Raj . . . [T]he importance of caste appears to have grown. (Fuller 1977: 111)

[I]t is the very differentiation of the caste system from the wider politico-economic system of land control, which resulted from British rule and which is reflected in the materials on which he draws, that makes Dumont's thesis concerning the separation of power from status plausible. In this respect, perhaps, the British paradoxically brought about a state of affairs closer to that prescribed by the ancient texts than had previously obtained. (Ibid. 113)<sup>3</sup>

In view of such arguments, and in view of the increasing stress scholars have placed on the central role of the king in the Hindu social order, it is surprising that more attention has not been paid to that part of the subcontinent where British influence was least, namely Nepal.<sup>4</sup>

Nepal was conquered neither by the Muslims nor by the British, though the effects of both dominations of India were certainly felt in the hills. Self-consciously Hindu rulers continued to uphold caste and to regulate the social organization of their subjects according to Hindu models until 1959, when the new constitution declared all citizens equal before the law. Furthermore, the Nepalese state has so far taken no measures of positive discrimination in favour of those disadvantaged by the caste system, as have long been in place in India. Thus, in spite of the changes which have undoubtedly taken place, and are taking place at an increasingly rapid pace, it remains true that traditions, practices, and ideas which have long been rendered controversial in India are still in Nepal relatively uncontested parts of everyday life.



This is particularly so of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley. In spite of all the qualifications to be adduced presently, the Newars' social system is, in South Asian terms, archaic. That is to say, it represents in its broad outlines a type of urban living, with forms of organization and culture, that goes back to the pre-Muslim period in north India. Newar society is particularly characteristic of a formative period in South Asian history. This, then, is the first reason why it should be of interest to South Asianists generally.

The most obvious example of the cultural conservatism of the Kathmandu Valley is the presence of Buddhism, which has long since died out, the iconoclasm of conquering Muslims delivering the *coup de grâce*, in the rest of the mainland subcontinent.<sup>5</sup> In the Kathmandu Valley Buddhist priests and sacred sites are as important as Hindu ones. There is a complex relationship between the two religions, simultaneously competitive and ecumenical. It was the search for the last remaining South Asian Mahāyāna Buddhists that led the French Sanskritist, Sylvain Lévi, to visit Nepal in 1898, and to write its history in three volumes (Lévi 1905). 'Nepal', he wrote, and by that he meant the Kathmandu Valley, 'is India in the making . . . In a territory so limited that it almost seems to have been designed as a laboratory, the observer can easily grasp the sequence of steps which from ancient India have given rise to modern India' (ibid. i. 28). A corollary of this is that the *kṣatriya* (king, ruler, warrior) role occurs in its full colours in Nepal, being, for example, heavily involved in animal sacrifice and in Tantric religion; it is not attenuated by centuries of non-Hindu domination. The mass sacrifice of buffaloes at the annual Dasaī/Mohanī festival, still practised in Kathmandu, has long since been abandoned or suppressed as a royal ritual in other parts of the subcontinent (Fuller 1992: 114, 117–19).

In a similar way, the cult of Indra,<sup>6</sup> long since moribund in India, is still a significant part of the Newars' annual festival cycle. A further small example of cultural conservatism is the fact that Newar women, except a few acculturated to non-Newar ways, never wear nose ornaments, which were adopted in South Asia only after the Muslim conquests (Basham 1967: 214). Finally, as I have argued elsewhere (Gellner 1991), the Newars' characteristically isogamous marriage patterns can be interpreted as an aspect of this archaism. Interestingly, many anthropologists who have studied the Newars have tended to look for archaism of a rather different sort, namely for 'tribal' or pre-Hindu institutions, practices, or survivals. This will be discussed further below.

A second way in which this book attempts to contribute to the anthropology of South Asia is in its multi-authored, multi-viewpoint approach. Each contributor was asked to look at the entire Newar social system from the point of view of a particular caste or set of castes within it. Thus, instead of a study of one small village, or of one caste, a regional caste system is presented from all the most important different viewpoints within it. This brings out the extent to

which caste societies' systems of ranking are indeed contested and not given, both within and between castes.

Since the Kathmandu Valley is a relatively small and compact region—Lévi's 'laboratory'—it has been possible to do this with a degree of systematic coverage. Furthermore, this region includes towns and cities as well as villages, and this is a third reason to claim some originality. Relatively few writings on caste in the subcontinent offer an urban perspective, and, with one exception as far as I know, none does so for pre-modern cities.

The exception, highly relevant for present purposes, is Robert Levy's massive *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal* (1990), which unfortunately came out after most of the ethnographic chapters of this volume had already been completed. Levy's book in a sense complements this one. It concentrates on Bhaktapur, the main urban centre in the east of the Kathmandu Valley. By contrast, the contributions of this book mostly focus on Kathmandu and Lalitpur, the other two main cities of the Valley, or on nearby villages, all of which are in the west of the Valley. (An exception to this is the part of Quigley's discussion relating to Dhulikhel, which lies beyond the eastern rim of the Valley and falls within Bhaktapur's sphere of cultural influence.)

Another large and important book on the Newars, Gérard Toffin's *Société et religion chez les Néwar du Népal* (1984), also contains much material highly relevant to the present themes. Its author, who has done more, and more varied, anthropological fieldwork on the Newars than anyone else, has contributed two chapters here.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1. The Licchavi, Thakuri, and Malla periods

The Newars are the 'traditional' inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. The ethnonym 'Newar' and the place name 'Nepal' are in fact etymologically identical. Still today many hill people call the Kathmandu Valley 'Nepal'. It was around the beginning of the nineteenth century that the British first extended the name of the Valley to all the territory ruled by the Shah dynasty. The Nepalese state itself adopted this usage only at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Most ordinary Newars are not consciously aware of the etymological identity of 'Nepal' and 'Newar'; Newar intellectuals and cultural nationalists, on the other hand, make great play with it.

The fact that the Newars are divided by caste, religion, locality, and dialect makes the question of Newar ethnicity a highly complex one, about which the contributors to this volume are by no means in full agreement.<sup>8</sup> While the place-name 'Nepal' and the epithet *naipālāḥ* 'the people of Nepal', go back to

the fifth century, the term 'Newar' is only attested from the mid-seventeenth century. It may have existed in colloquial speech for some time before that. At any rate, at that time it referred primarily to members of the politically dominant or *kṣatriya* groups. They were the leaders of the people of Nepal, who spoke *nepāl-bhāṣā* ('the language of Nepal'), known colloquially as *newā-bhāy*, i.e. what is in English today called Newari. It is plausible to assume that 'Newar' as a group label derived from the name of the language.

Newari is a Tibeto-Burman language, but this is a fact Newar intellectuals have learnt only in the modern period. For all of its known history Newari has been within the socio-linguistic ambit of north India, taking from Indo-European languages vast numbers of loan words, and even grammatical features (e.g. the rhetorical *na . . . na . . .* to mean 'neither . . . nor . . .'). Sanskrit is the scriptural and liturgical language of both Hindus and Buddhists. Today this process of external borrowing continues at a redoubled pace, in spite of the efforts of Newar cultural nationalists to combat it. Most Newar men and all of the younger generation are now bilingual in Nepali and Newari: education, radio, television, and most newspapers are in Nepali. Many Newars, particularly those of the Śreṣṭha caste, have begun to speak Nepali systematically to their children.<sup>9</sup>

The Newari language seems to have been spoken by the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley as far back as the records go. The history of the Valley is divided into periods by dynasty: the Kirata period, which pre-dates any definite historical record but is referred to in local chronicles and oral accounts, the Licchavi period (fifth to ninth centuries), the Thakuri period (ninth century to 1200), the Malla period (1200–1768), and the Shah period (1769 to the present).<sup>10</sup> Inscriptions of the Licchavi period, the first dated CE 464, are entirely in Sanskrit (a pure and high-flown Sanskrit rarely attained in subsequent centuries), but analysis of the place-names mentioned shows that the Valley's inhabitants spoke what is recognizably the ancestor of modern Newari (Malla 1981; 1983).

The Newars themselves are by no means entirely descended from those Licchavi period inhabitants. Most Newar castes have a myth of origin claiming provenance from the plains to the south; in some cases, at least for some members of the caste, these myths are not to be dismissed out of hand. For some castes, those which enjoy *kṣatriya*, or not too far below *kṣatriya*, status, *later* arrival within the Valley correlates with *higher* status. These castes claim to have been kings of an earlier dynasty, or to have been courtiers of incoming kings. Other, artisanal castes, such as the Rājkarṇikārs (Sweet-Makers) of Lalitpur, claim to have been *brāhmaṇs* in India. The Khaḍgī, Butcher, caste, also claims relatively late, *kṣatriya*, origin (see below, Ch. 9). It is evident to the most casual observer that Newars are of diverse racial origin, different physiognomies being evident both within and between castes.<sup>11</sup>

It is possible that even in the Licchavi period Nepal may have been characterized by cultural archaism. The very name 'Licchavi', proudly adopted by the ruling dynasty, was an old and respected one in the Gangetic plain. Candra Gupta, who reigned CE 320–35 and claimed that he received tribute from Nepal, was proud to proclaim his marriage to a Licchavi princess. His descendants continued to give the title prominence in their inscriptions (Basham 1967: 64).

The Licchavi period saw the first appearance of a monarchical state and associated high Indian culture in the Kathmandu Valley. This was possible here, and not elsewhere in this part of the Himalayas, because of the uniquely fertile soil of the Kathmandu Valley, which was once the bed of a lake. At the same time, the Valley enjoys an hospitable climate, high above the malarial forests of the Gangetic plain but well below the extreme cold of Himalayan passes and the Tibetan plateau (see Fig. 1.1). This strategic combination of agricultural surplus and temperate climate allowed the rulers of the Valley to

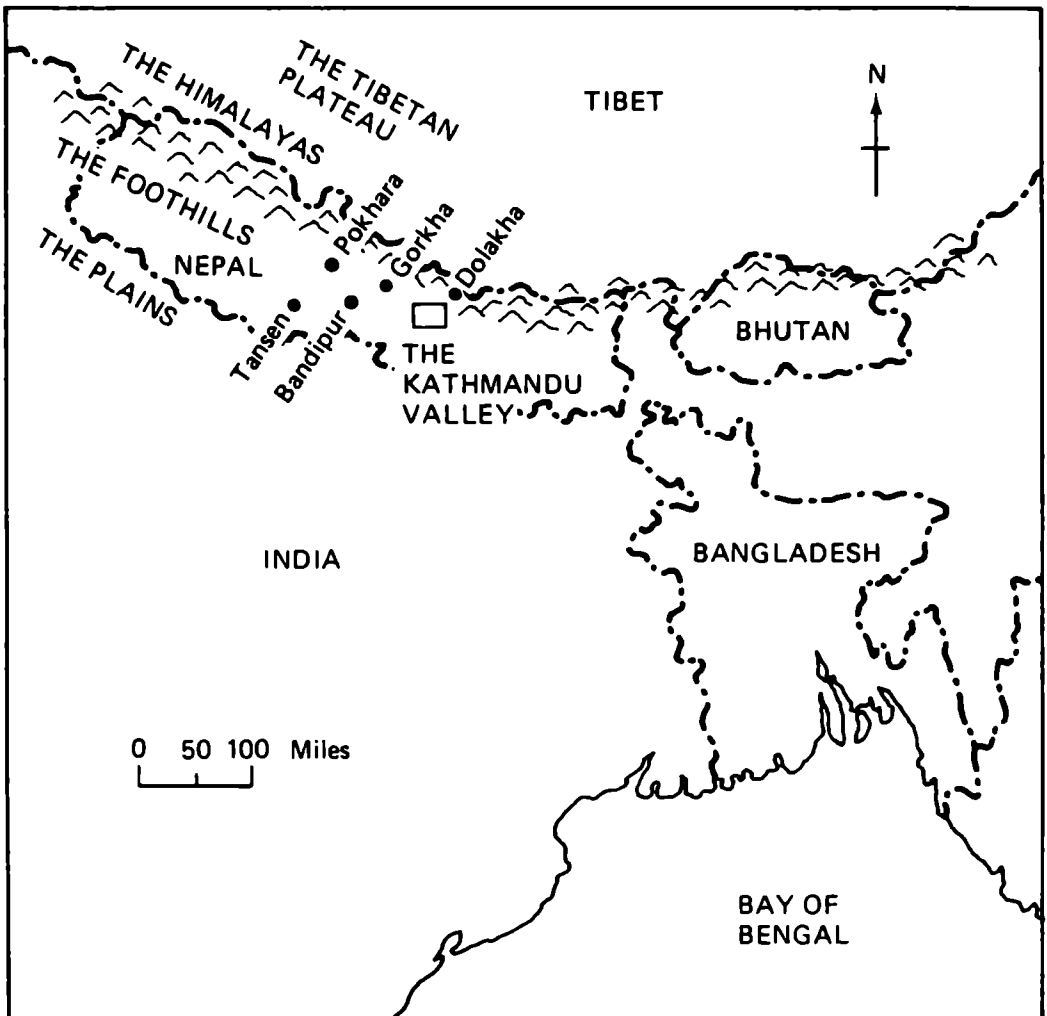


FIG. 1.1. Map of the Himalayas showing the position of the Kathmandu Valley

control trade routes between the plains and Tibet, thus adding further to their means of acquiring wealth.

Both Buddhism and Hinduism flourished and were supported by the Licchavi rulers of Nepal. From their inscriptions we know that the Licchavi rulers were proud to be *kṣatriyas*, patrons of *brāhmaṇs*, and upholders of the caste system. The latter they called the *varṇāśrama-sthiti* or *varṇāśrama-vyavasthā*, the (Hindu) system of *varṇa* (roughly 'caste') and *āśrama* (stage of life). More is not known about caste at this time, but in a detailed analysis Sharma (1983) shows that over the period there was a process of Sanskritization, which may be read as evidence of a tribal society taking on the forms of Hinduism of the day. Officials or leaders with non-Sanskritic titles were gradually replaced by Sanskritic ones and by grants made direct from the king. These grants went (a) to groups known as *pāñcālī* and *goṣṭhī*, both apparently ancestors of the modern Newar *guthi* (see below), (b) to associations (*śālā*) of artisans, or (c) to religious organizations (the Śaivite *vaśapāśupatācāryas* and the Buddhist monastic community, *āryasaṃgha*). Such groups were not only granted land free of tax, but were invested with judicial authority previously held by the pre-Licchavi officials or leaders who had non-Sanskritic titles. Sharma also suggests that the settlement patterns of Newar castes today, and even some of their festivals, are descended directly from those of Licchavi times.<sup>12</sup>

The Thakuri period which followed was in fact not presided over by a single dynasty.<sup>13</sup> Political authority seems to have fragmented and local chronicles relate that Kathmandu had twelve kings and Lalitpur twenty-four.<sup>14</sup> It is in the Malla period that most of what counts as 'traditional Newar culture' took its present form. It is to that period that the numerous nineteenth-century chronicles which are a kind of Malinowskian charter of present-day Newar practices, including caste ranking, ascribe the origin of what they seek to legitimate. They do this because 1769, with the arrival of the Shah dynasty, marked a moment of crisis for the Newars, and they needed to persuade the new rulers of the validity and antiquity of their traditions.

Throughout the Malla period the connection with Tirhut (also known as Mithilā, Videha, and Simraungarh) was particularly close and Maithil cultural influence was considerable. Not only were there frequent and destructive invasions by the Maithils between 1097 and 1314 (Slusser 1982: 46), the Maithils themselves fled to Nepal when attacked by Muslims. The nineteenth-century chronicles fill a gap in the Thakuri period with a dynasty descended from Nānyadeva (who reigned in Tirhut from 1097), when in fact he only made an invasion into Nepal, and never conquered it. Certain high-caste Śreṣṭha families trace their descent from Nānyadeva's courtiers, as do some Khaḍgī (see Ch. 9). These Śreṣṭhas claim to be Nayars who accompanied Nānyadeva from south India. This claim, whether valid or not, is encouraged by the phonetic similarity of 'Newar' and 'Nayar', and has been misleadingly invoked to explain



the origin and position of the Newars in South Asian culture by observers from Kirkpatrick (who visited the Valley in 1793), to Hodgson (based there from 1820 to 1843), and even Dumont (on whom see further below).<sup>15</sup> In the case of Harisimpha Deva, a descendant of Nānyadeva, the chronicles likewise represent him as conquering Nepal, but recent research by Nepalese historians has shown that in fact he was fleeing from Ghiyās ud-dīn Tughlaq of Delhi, and that he died in 1326 before he reached the Kathmandu Valley.

The beginning of the Malla period is little known. For present purposes the crucial period begins with the reign of Sthiti Malla (1382–95). He seems to have been a Maithil of considerable political ability who married into the royal family, and succeeded over the years in gathering more and more power until he was able to take the throne and declare himself king.<sup>16</sup> Sthiti Malla is an important figure in the nineteenth-century chronicles and in oral traditions. He is credited with regulating the Newar caste system and with numerous other reforms; for instance, according to Padmagiri's chronicle:

*1st.* He established the practice [which allowed his subjects] to sell or mortgage their own land, houses, or fields.

*2nd.* He distinguished and classified (*nirṇay garnu*) the 36 castes within the 4 *varṇas*.

*3rd.* He abolished the only two punishments used by previous kings, namely beating (*hastaprahār*) and abusive language, and in lieu of them substituted fines.

*4th.* He established the custom that on the death of their king, the 36 castes should come together, make the litter, and carry off the corpse to be cremated, while playing the *rāg* called Dipak.

*5th.* He established the custom that, when any of his subjects from the 36 castes died, the Rājābhak (Kāhār) and Khadgī (Kasāhi) [Kasāī] should play music.

*6th.* He constituted a fine for all such persons as follow the profession (*kārya*) of another caste, without following that of their own caste.<sup>17</sup>

The chronicle begins its account by saying that Sthiti Malla, or Jayasthiti Malla as it calls him, prefixing the honorific 'Jaya', 'established many laws in Nepal'; Hodgson rendered this by writing that Sthiti Malla was 'so called owing to the many laws he framed for this country'. The term *sthiti* or *thiti* means 'laws' or 'customary regulations' in Sanskrit and Newari. In fact it is probable that Newars in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ascribed what they considered to be their traditional customs to Sthiti Malla in an attempt to make them appear legitimate (i.e. ancient, sanctified by royal proclamation, and in accordance with scripture) in the eyes of the new Parbatiyā rulers. As Sylvain Lévi (1905: i. 196) pointed out, the nineteenth-century chroniclers wrote in Nepali, the language of the new rulers, for this very reason, that they wished to persuade their new masters to respect, and not appropriate or abolish, their long-established temples, endowments, and customs. To some extent they were successful, in that the courts of Hodgson's time (1830s) referred to customs established (supposedly) by Sthiti Malla for cases involving Chetris, Newars, or Tibetans (Hodgson 1880: ii. 231).

The long reign of Sthiti Malla's grandson, Yakṣa Malla (1428–82), was a time of peace and stability within the Valley contrasting sharply with the frequent and destructive Maithil, Khas (from west Nepal), and Muslim invasions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At Yakṣa Malla's death, his kingdom was left to his six sons and one nephew; eventually it divided into three. Henceforth, until the end of the Malla period, there were three kingdoms: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. Each city had a hinterland of Newar villages owing tribute and having cultural links which often continue to this day (for instance, Bhaktapur's Nava Durgā dance troupe still visits the villages of Bhaktapur's old kingdom).<sup>18</sup>

The kings of the three cities, when they were not attending festivities in each others' kingdoms, warred with one another, allying now with one, now with another. In spite of their being kin, and sharing a culture, they had no hesitation in allying with non-Newar kingdoms outside the Valley against each other. Indeed, although all Newars today look back on the Mallas as 'Newar kings', and often believe that they (unlike kings of today) were concerned for the welfare of their subjects, the evidence suggests that the Malla kings themselves did not see themselves as Newars in any significant way. It would never have occurred to them to see 'Newariness' as a ground for alliance with some and opposing others. Rather, they called themselves *sūryavamśī*, descendants of Rāma and the sun; more immediately they traced their descent from King Harisimha of Tirhut and from his ancestor, Nānyadeva of south India (Kārnāṭa).

Yakṣa Malla brought in south Indian Brāhmaṇs to be the priests of Paśupati. This was, and remains, the most important Hindu temple of the kingdom, 'by the grace of whose feet' the Mallas declared that they ruled. Apart from Paśupati, the other main deity whom they invoked to legitimate their rule was Māneśvarī, an old goddess now identified with Taleju (or Tulajā), who likewise came from south India. It was the secret mantra of Taleju which was believed to confer power on the king; he was supposed to pass it on, on his death-bed, to his successor. The Malla kings also added a form of 'Nārāyaṇa' to their own names, expressing a Vaiṣṇava devotion which they derived from Tirhut. Yakṣa Malla called himself an avatar of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa.<sup>19</sup> Numerous Maithil Brāhmaṇs came to the Kathmandu Valley from Tirhut; Newar Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs today trace their descent from them. Hindu law texts (of Manu, Nārada, and Yājñavalkya) were translated into Newari. The kings themselves produced plays, mostly in Maithili, but also in Newari, on classical Hindu themes.

In all these ways, the 'Newar' kings defined themselves as *not* local. Their right to rule was derived from their links to places and divinities elsewhere in the subcontinent. Whatever the historicity of Sthiti Malla's 'reforms', it is certain that the kings of the later Malla period sought to make their subjects follow Hindu norms, both in relation to death and to categories of pollution within temples.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2. The modern period

The ancestor of the present kings of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah, nowadays officially styled 'the Great', and 'Father of the Nation', came from Gorkha, a small kingdom about fifty miles west of the Kathmandu Valley. In 1768 and 1769 he succeeded after twenty-five years of struggle in conquering the three divided cities of the Valley, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. He arrived in Kathmandu, to no resistance, during the festival of Indra Jātrā (Yēnyāḥ) of 1768, and received the blessing of the 'living goddess' Kumārī, who is identified with Taleju. Newars themselves interpret this as showing that the gods accepted the new dynasty (other stories are told with the same moral).

The decades of war which preceded 1769 had been a time of deprivation and suffering, and there is every reason to believe that a great part of the Newar population welcomed the peace introduced by the new Parbatiyā ('hill people') rulers. There were, however, expropriations, and many Newars emigrated from the Valley both east and west, either pushed by poverty or pulled by new commercial opportunities in the long stretch of the middle hills now for the first time brought under a single ruler.<sup>21</sup> Newars became the merchants and shopkeepers, as well as the artisans, of the new polity. With the arrival of peace and stability Newars could continue their profitable trade in Tibet where they received preferential treatment from the Tibetan authorities (M. C. Regmi 1971: 11; Stiller 1973: 25–6). Increasingly, Śreṣṭha Newars also became administrators and tax-collectors for the new regime.

The Shah dynasty, their language, and the Parbatiyā ethnic group which formed the backbone of their support, all came to be known as Gorkhālī, after the small hill town, Gorkha, which was the seat of Prithvi Narayan Shah's original kingdom. This usage can still be heard. The English 'Gurkha' is simply a corruption of 'Gorkhā'. Prior to this the Parbatiyās' language was simply called 'Parbatiyā' or 'Parbate', and it is still often called *parti bhāy* by Newars.<sup>22</sup> It was only in 1930 that the Rana rulers of Nepal decided to adopt 'Nepali' as the official designation. The official newspaper, the Gorkhapatra, had been appearing since 1901, and it has kept that name ever since.

The conquest, or 'unification' as it is officially styled, created a new situation for the Newars. Previous rulers of the Valley either in fact came from the Indian plains or claimed to do so, but they composed plays in Newari as well as in other more prestigious idioms (e.g. Maithili) and adopted many Newar customs. In the early years of the Shah dynasty the possibility that they too might be 'Newarized' may well have existed. Certainly important rituals and observances of the Malla kings were kept up, as they still are today. However, neither occasional cultural sympathy, as on the part of Prithvi Narayan's son, Pratap Singh,<sup>23</sup> nor the use of Newar priests and other specialists, ever led to regular intermarriage with high-status Newars. Newars as a whole remained a subordinate and despised group.

In what is known as the Rana period, 1846–1951, effective power was in the hands of hereditary Rana prime ministers. The ruling class became more consciously Parbatiyā, culminating in the twentieth century with active measures to promote Nepali and suppress Newari.<sup>24</sup> In so far as Newars had access to the ruling class, it was only on a presupposition of subordinate status. The Law Code (Muluki Ain) of 1854, authoritatively studied by Höfer (1979), attempted to articulate a single caste order for the whole kingdom.<sup>25</sup>

It will be seen from Table 1.1 that the Law Code classified castes and ethnic groups into five broad categories. The Tamangs who live around the Kathmandu Valley and practise Tibetan Buddhism were assimilated to Tibetans and classified as enslavable. (It was only in 1932 that the government

TABLE 1.1. *All-Nepal caste hierarchy of the 1854 Law Code*

	Ethnic affiliation (P = Parbatiyā; N = Newar)
<i>I. Wearers of the sacred thread</i>	
Upādhyāya Brāhmaṇ (Bāhun)	P
Ṭhakurī (the royal caste)	P
Jaisi Brāhmaṇ	P
Chetri ( <i>kṣatriya</i> )	P
Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇ ('Deva Bhāju')	N
Indian Brāhmaṇs	other
Ascetics	P
'Lower' Jaisi Brāhmaṇ	P
Certain high Śreṣṭha groups (e.g. Joṣī)	N
<i>II. Non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers</i>	
Non-threadwearing Śreṣṭha	N
Vajracārya/Śākya/Urāy-Tulādhār <i>et al.</i>	N
Maharjan (Jyāpu)	N
Various Newar service castes	N
Hill tribes (e.g. Magar, Gurung)	other
<i>III. Enslavable alcohol-drinkers</i>	
Tibetans (incl. Tamangs); some small tribes;	
Thāru	other
<i>IV. Impure but 'touchable' castes</i>	
Khadgī (Butchers, Milk-Sellers)	N
Kāpālī (Death Specialists, Musicians)	N
Rajaka (Washermen)	N
Carmakār (Drum-Makers)	N
Muslims (Bangle-Sellers)	other
Westerners ( <i>mlecch</i> )	other
<i>V. Untouchables</i>	
Various Parbatiyā castes	P
Dyahlā (Sweepers)	N
Cyāmkhalah (Sweepers, Scavengers)	N

Source: Adapted from Höfer 1979: 45, 137; for low castes, cf. Ch. 9, Table 9.1.

recognized them as a distinct group and bestowed on them the name 'Tāmāṅg': Höfer 1979: 147; Holmberg 1989: 30.) Other major 'hill tribes'—the Gurungs, Magars, Rais, and Limbus—were placed higher, in the non-enslavable class. The rather more complex Newar system could only be forced into this scheme with some difficulty, and against the traditions of some of the participants, traditions which in other cases the state usually attempted to recognize. Newar Brāhmaṇs were placed below Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs and below even Parbatiyā *kṣatriyas* (Chetris). A large number of distinct, and ranked Newar castes were lumped together in the second category, the non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers, although in other contexts (when divorce payments were being stipulated) distinctions between them were recognized. Even then, however, Śreṣṭhas were placed above the Buddhist sacerdotal caste of Vajrācāryas and Śākyas, doing violence to the Newars' traditional system, but in accordance with the strongly Hindu bias of the code's sponsors. Newar Untouchables were placed below Parbatiyā Untouchables, and the slightly higher Newar 'impure but not Untouchable' castes filled a category of their own, otherwise only occupied by Muslims and foreigners.

Subordination to Parbatiyās meant that the Newars' social system was more closed than before. Until 1769 new groups evidently were absorbed into the hierarchy, if not with ease, nevertheless without undue difficulty, providing they had the support of the king. After 1769 the Newar system became marginalized as a whole, and in order to protect their status Newar castes had to become more exclusive. Even then, on an individual basis, newcomers could still be accepted if absorbed into wealthy or influential families. For example, it is widely assumed that many (some say all) of the Urāy/Tulādhār *et al.* caste descend from mixed marriages with Tibetan women (see Ch. 2). Toffin cites the case of a prestigious Śreṣṭha family in Panauti which is known to be descended from the mixed union of a Maharjan and a non-Newar Puri (1984: 380–1). According to Oldfield (1981: ii. 138), surgeon at the British Residency in Kathmandu from 1850 to 1863, Vajrācārya families habitually took in Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇ boys and brought them up as Vajrācāryas. Locke (1985: 317) cites from informants a case where a Brāhmaṇ man became a Vajrācārya in Lagan Bāhāḥ, Kathmandu, five generations ago; the account is substantially confirmed by a document published by M. C. Regmi (1970: 116), which adds the details that he married a 'Banda' (probably Vajrācārya) woman and that his son petitioned the government for recognition as a 'Banda'. However, such cases apart, it remains highly probable that the Newar caste hierarchy began to acquire after 1769 a rigidity it had not had before.

For those Newars old enough to remember it, the Rana period represents a stark contrast to the period since 1951, which is referred to as the coming of 'democracy' (*prajātantra*). Whereas now there are numerous economic opportunities, and a degree of security for those not actively involved in politics, in the Rana period one had constantly to be afraid. Lineage solidarity was much

greater, because only among kin was there any security. Caste rules were kept strictly because they were encouraged by the state, and to be outcasted meant to be abandoned by one's relatives. Taking up the caste specialism of another caste was likewise punishable by law. An Untouchable who polluted food with his or her hand, even accidentally, could be made to reimburse the owner for the cost of the food. Compared to today, tenant farmers were mostly very poor. They had to hand over half or more of each crop to their landlord, and to provide numerous menial and ritual services as well; they usually wore the cast-off clothes of their landlord, and (they claim) they had no security of tenure.

Since 1951 the Kathmandu Valley has experienced rapid development, benefiting far more than the rest of the country because it houses the capital. The Valley now has electricity, drains, metalled roads, hospitals, schools, colleges, a university, numerous businesses, scores of foreign aid agencies, hundreds of hotels, digital telephones, cinemas, video parlours, and television. There has been massive immigration by Nepalese from the hills, by refugees from Tibet, and more recently by poor Indians from Bihar. Overcrowding, inadequate drainage, pollution, traffic jams, water and electricity shortages have all worsened since the end of the 1980s. Land prices have spiralled, especially within or near the Kathmandu–Lalitpur conurbation enclosed by the ring road. Tourism, 'development', and entrepôt business between Hong Kong and India have become major 'industries'. In 1990 a 'people's movement' (*jan āndolan*), led jointly by the banned Congress Party and an alliance of Communist parties, overthrew the Partyless Panchayat Democracy which had provided the political framework since 1959. There is now a multi-party system in which the Congress Party managed to gain a majority of seats in the National Assembly in elections held in 1991. It is significant, however, that they won only two out of the ten seats in the Kathmandu Valley. Communists of various sorts won the other eight.

All this is the background to new trends of social mobility, relaxation of caste barriers (at least between near-ranking castes), and the rise of a Newar ethnicity based on cultural and linguistic nationalism. In short, in attempting to analyse the Newar caste hierarchy today, one is, undoubtedly, aiming at a rapidly moving target.

### 3. *The 'Double-Headed' Newar Caste Hierarchy*

As is surely the case in all complex caste hierarchies, claims to high status are based on multiple criteria which in many cases conflict or are evaluated differently. In Newar society there is ample scope for opposing views and contested rankings between castes of similar status. Within castes too, as is amply documented below (see especially Chs. 3–5), the ranking of lower-order groups is

also contested. It can even be argued that the person of the king should be seen as superior, or at least not inferior, to Brāhmaṇs, in some important contexts.<sup>26</sup> In different localities the same caste may be ranked and treated differently. Furthermore, certain castes, notably the Tulādhār *et al.* in Kathmandu and the Tāmraṁ *et al.* in Lalitpur, are found only within one city, and do not interact in any systematic way with the inhabitants of other cities. Consequently, any attempt to combine all Newars into a single list is inevitably artificial. At the very least, we need to talk of several sub-regional hierarchies.

Yet, at the same time, the broad outlines and the major criteria of hierarchy are generally accepted. There are, moreover, some important castes, such as Brāhmaṇs, Śreṣṭhas, Khaḍgī, and Dyahlā, who are not only found throughout the Valley but themselves intermarry throughout.

The first important point to make about the Newar caste hierarchy as it functions today—and here unfortunately the discussion must become increasingly technical—is that it has two competing priestly ‘heads’ or ‘summits’: the Hindu Brāhmaṇs (see Ch. 6) and the Buddhist Śākya-and-Vajrācārya combine (see Ch. 7). This marks a radical difference with regional hierarchies elsewhere in South Asia, with the hierarchy presupposed both by the 1854 Law Code (illustrated in Table 1.1 above), and indeed with the Newars’ own learned models as found, for example, in the chronicles. Some Newar castes have Brāhmaṇs as domestic priests (*purohit*); others, Vajrācāryas. Within certain castes some households have a Brāhmaṇ, others a Vajrācārya, so that if a marriage occurs between such families, the two priests are said to officiate side by side, a rare instance of such co-operation.

In the western half of the Valley it is best to see these two sacerdotal groups as of a similar, but essentially contested rank, each claiming superiority over the other, each claiming moral and religious leadership of an otherwise unitary hierarchy. It is not a question of similar but parallel hierarchies, which it would be artificial to meld into one because the elements do not interact systematically, as in the case of the local, Muslim, and Gaddi hierarchies mentioned by Parry (1979: 103) in his description of Kangra. Arguably the 1854 Law Code, which attempted to provide a single all-Nepal hierarchy inevitably involved just this kind of artificiality, although of course here the law-makers had political reasons for what they did, and in the long run their actions had consequences for local interactions.

Usually most non-priestly Newar castes, conscious of the position of Hinduism in Nepal as a whole, and aware of Vajrācārya priests’ use and consumption of alcohol, say that Brāhmaṇs are superior to Vajrācāryas. If their own traditional priest is a Vajrācārya they none the less continue to respect and show deference to him and his wife (except in the case of some Śreṣṭhas now embarrassed by their traditional association with Buddhism). In the east of the Valley, focused on Bhaktapur, researchers have preferred to postulate a single-headed hierarchy, with Brāhmaṇs alone at the top, and they put the Vajrācāryas and

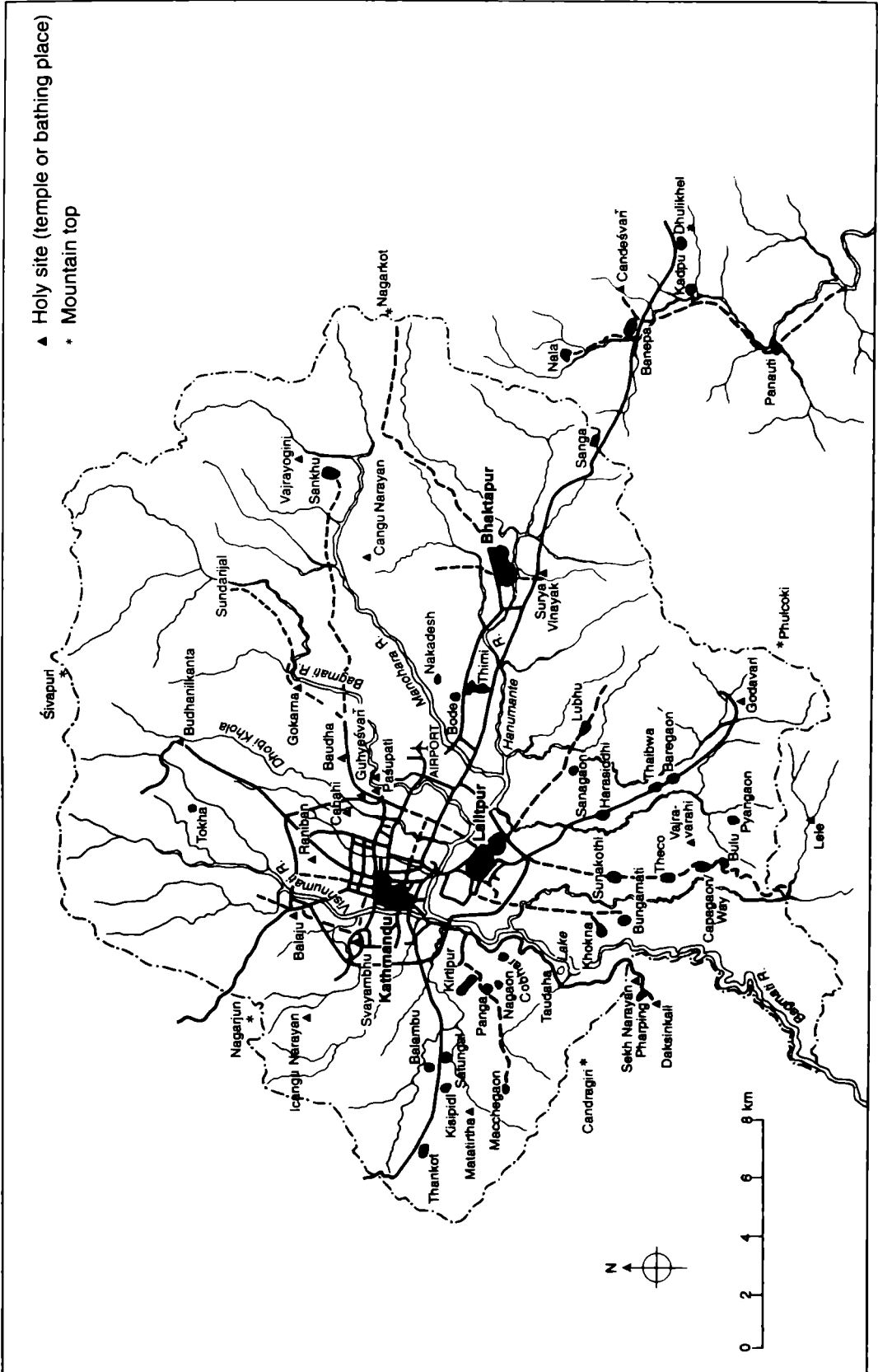


FIG. 1.2. Map of the Kathmandu and Banepa Valleys, showing the main Newar settlements

Source: N. Gutschow.



Śākyas (called Buddhācāryas in Bhaktapur) outside the hierarchy altogether (Gutschow and Kölver 1975: 58; Levy 1990: 96).

In addition to the Brāhmaṇ and the Vajrācārya, there are other types of ritual officiant, especially in Newar Hinduism. There are also low-status specialists, such as the Kāpālī (see Ch. 9), whom Levy (1990) appropriately calls 'para-priests'. These two, however, the Brāhmaṇ and the Vajrācārya, define the two traditional Newar divisions, *śivamārgī*, 'followers of the path of Śiva', and *buddhamārgī*, 'followers of the path of the Buddha'.<sup>27</sup>

At middle and lower levels of the caste hierarchy, although the question of priest is an important part of local identity, it does not determine differences of outlook or value. The difference is significant socially in that Buddhism has lower prestige, so that switching priests is a recognized method of Sanskritization both within the broad Śreṣṭha category and among upwardly mobile families originally from lower castes and now attempting to pass as Śreṣṭhas (see Ch. 3). Thus most of those with Brāhmaṇ priests are generally Hindu in orientation, but it would be wrong to take it for granted that all those castes and households with Vajrācārya priests are self-consciously Buddhist.

### 3.1. Six 'blocs' or levels in the hierarchy

The caste system of the Newars is complex, with as many levels and types of caste as are generally found in the north Indian plain. In this it contrasts, as noted above, with the much simpler Parbatīyā hierarchy. There are essentially six major divisions within the Newar caste hierarchy, and these are shown in Fig. 1.3. Quigley argues that perpendicular representations such as this are seriously misleading (see below, Ch. 10, and Quigley 1993: 152–6). I would claim that they do correspond to one important way that Newars themselves view the caste system: Newars do indeed talk of 'high' and 'low' castes, and texts such as the Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī list them in rank order. As Höfer (1979: 211) says of the 1854 Law Code: 'The caste hierarchy of the MA [Muluki Ain, Law Code] is a linear conception . . . The MA, thus, clearly falsifies the thesis holding that, at least in India, regional and supra-regional caste hierarchies with clear-cut rankings were an artificial creation of the compilers of the Census of India.' Furthermore, the six levels of the hierarchy can be expressed equally as a series of inclusions and exclusions, as shown in Fig. 1.4, and this kind of representation is, one could argue, more spatial (two-dimensional) than unilinear (one-dimensional).

A related kind of spatial organization, residence patterns within the traditional Newar city, suggests that the king in his palace is at the centre with all the other castes arrayed around him, high castes near the centre, middle castes further out, and Untouchables outside the city walls (Gellner 1992: 46–9). Perhaps a linear hierarchy and the centre–periphery model can be combined in a cone or pyramid image, so that the centre is simultaneously the highest point;

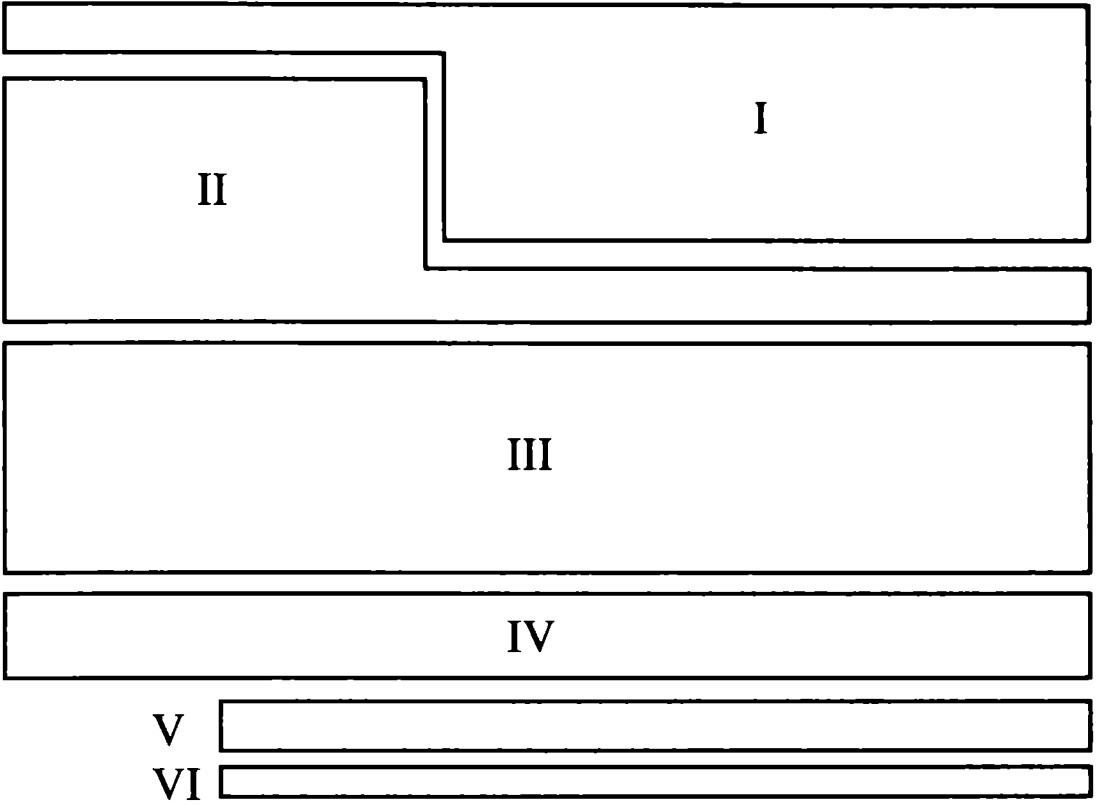


FIG. 1.3 Six major subdivisions of the most elaborate Newar caste hierarchies and the criteria used to make them

*Notes:*

- I. Bloc I comprises priests entitled to the honorific auxiliary *bijyāye* (from Skt. *vijaya*, 'victory', plus *yāye*, 'to do'); they are never addressed with the ordinary honorific auxiliary, *diye*. This bloc consists of the Brāhmaṇs (see Ch. 6), a very small caste, and the Vajrācārya-and-Sākya combine (Ch. 7), a relatively large caste.
- II. I and II together are those castes entitled either to full Tantric initiation (Buddhist or Hindu) and/or to wear the Hindu sacred thread. These castes (I and II) are sometimes referred to by lower castes as *bhājupī*, 'gentlemen' (deriving from Skt. *bhadrālok*: Manandhar 1986: s.v.). The main caste here is the large, mostly Hindu, caste, the Śreṣṭhas, divided in principle into two sub-castes, *chatharīya* and *pāñctharīya* (Chs. 3 and 4). In Kathmandu there is also the Buddhist high caste, the Urāy/Tulādhār *et al.* (Ch. 2).
- III. Blocs I, II, and III have their toe-nails cut by a Nāpit woman. (Traditionally, and still in many cases, she would visit regularly; for everyone the service is essential at major life-cycle rituals.) The main caste in bloc III is the Maharjans (Chs. 4 and 5). In Lalitpur there are also the Tāmraḱār *et al.*
- IV. The castes in this category (all those above Khaḍgī and below Āwāle) have their toe-nails cut by a Khaḍgī woman, except for Nāpits, who perform barbering and toe-nail-cutting for each other on an informal, *ad hoc* basis. There are numerous small castes in this category, including the Taṇḍukār and Vyañjankār (see Ch. 5), as well as the Mānandhar (Sāyṁi) Oil-Pressers, the Rañjitkār (Chipā) Dyers, the Nakarmī (Kau) Blacksmiths, the Nāpit (Nau) Barbers, and the Citrakār (Pū) Painters (see Ch. 8).
- V. This group comprises those from whom castes I–IV will not accept water, but whose touch does not require purification. It includes principally the Khaḍgī and the Kāpālī (see Ch. 9).
- VI. 'Clean' castes (I–IV inclusive) will not accept water from these castes and, if touched by them, are supposed to purify themselves. The main castes here are the Dyahlā and the Cyāmkhalah (see Ch. 9).

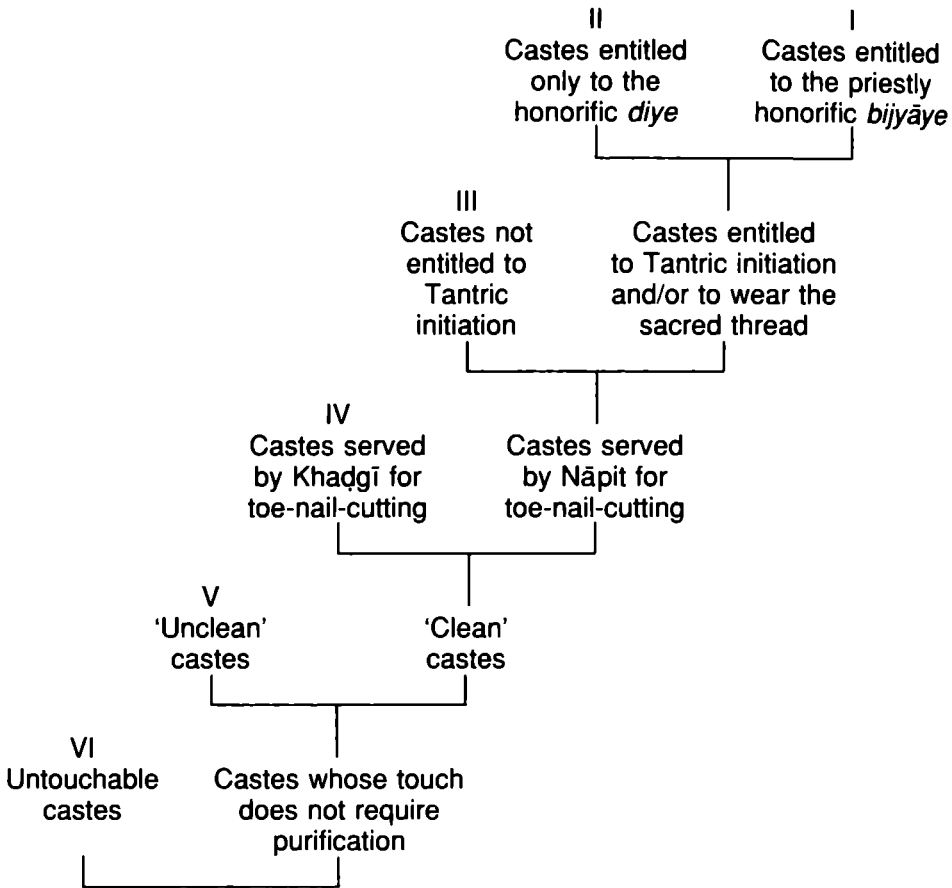


FIG. 1.4. The six major Newar caste blocs expressed as a series of inclusions and exclusions (see Fig. 1.3 for full explanation)

however, I know of no evidence that the social organization of the Newars, as opposed to, say, Tantric ritual visions of *maṇḍalas* as mountains, was ever viewed in this way. Moreover, even such an image does not resolve the ambiguity over who is at the top: Hindu priest, Buddhist priest, or king.

Essentially the same division of the caste hierarchy into six basic levels probably also applies to Bhaktapur. Levy (1990) identifies as many as nineteen different 'macro-status levels', but some of these are just single castes or sub-castes. Unfortunately he does not provide enough data on caste interaction to show this conclusively, but it seems plausible to assume that his nineteen levels in fact reduce to these six. Toffin (1984: 279) likewise analyses the caste hierarchy of Panauti, part of the cultural hinterland of Bhaktapur, into six broad blocs.<sup>28</sup>

As already mentioned above, the 1854 Law Code applied its own (Parbatīyā) criteria to the Newar caste hierarchy, in particular the criterion of alcohol consumption. Thus Vajrācāryas and Śākyas, of bloc I, are ranked below some bloc II Śreṣṭhas; for example, Joṣīs. Elsewhere, however, when dealing specifically with Newars, the Law Code recognizes exactly these six levels, though it continues to put Vajrācāryas and Śākyas on the same level as

Tulādhār *et al.* (Urāy) and puts high Śreṣṭhas (*tharghar ra asal śreṣṭh*) above them (Höfer 1979: 137).

In Toffin's analysis of Panauti, the right to wear the sacred thread is a crucial status marker, dividing the highest ranks from those below. In the 1854 Law Code it is the 'non-alcohol-drinkers' who are so marked off. For Parbatīyās, indeed, these are the same things: one may not drink alcohol and wear the sacred thread. The *matwālī* (alcohol-drinking) Chetris of west Nepal are considered anomalous and shocking for this very reason, that within one caste they have some who drink alcohol and others who wear the sacred thread. Among the Newars it is more complicated, however. High-status, thread-wearing Hindus, including Brāhmaṇs, *do* consume alcohol, and sacrifice animals, in secret or semi-secret Tantric contexts (Levy 1990: 305–6). But they only do these un-Vedic things in sacred contexts, when the meat and alcohol have been purified ritually. Vajrācārya priests, in fact, occasionally make exactly the same claim (Gellner 1992: 258).

Most of the six broad status levels identified here each contain two main castes: in some cases their relative ranking is disputed, as between Brāhmaṇs, on the one hand, and Śākya and Vajrācāryas, on the other, in bloc I; between Śreṣṭhas and Tulādhār *et al.* (Urāy) in Kathmandu in bloc II; between Maharjans and Tāmraṅkar *et al.* in Lalitpur in bloc III. Level IV, the low but clean castes, is different in type. Here there are a large number of very small castes, all endogamous and refusing intermarriage with each other, but ranked equivalently from the point of view of other castes. As Levy has noted for Bhaktapur (1990: 728 n. 23), the castes of bloc IV find it much easier than the low castes of blocs V and VI to ignore high-caste social and economic pressure and drop their stigmatizing specialisms. Although traditionally ranked below the farming castes of bloc III, the bloc IV artisans are loath to accept them as superiors, and do or did use their Maharjan tenants as messengers, just like high castes.

In addition to the three royal cities, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, there are thirty-nine towns or villages in or near the Valley which are predominantly Newar. In nineteen of them Śreṣṭhas are the most numerous caste; and in eighteen, Maharjans. In every case, the castes of what I have called blocs II and III together make up more than 70 per cent of the inhabitants (Müller-Böker 1988: 27–8).

### 3.2. 'Caste sub-groups' within Newar castes

Only in the case of one Newar caste is there a clear example of ranked, ideally endogamous sub-castes: as one might expect, it is found within the dominant Śreṣṭha caste, with its *chathariya* and *pāñchthariya* divisions (but see Ch. 3 on how the dividing line is fuzzy in actual practice). In addition, the large Maharjan caste is divided into geographically based, endogamous sub-castes

who contest each other's status (see Ch. 5). However, far more common among the Newars is a division of the caste into intermarrying sections which I have called *caste sub-groups*. Caste sub-groups have a distinct surname, socio-religious identity, and (in many cases) profession. Unlike castes and sub-castes, however, there is in caste sub-groups no *rule* of endogamy, but only a slight preference and statistical tendency towards it. As Fürer-Haimendorf (1957: 245) wrote, in an early survey, 'many so-called [Newar] "castes" are nothing but occupational and non-endogamous segments of larger caste-groups'.

Within a large caste having a number of caste sub-groups, as, for example, the Tulādhār *et al.* (Urāy) of Kathmandu, most marriages are made outside the caste sub-group. The different sub-groups jostle for position within the caste. It is possible to establish some kind of rank order between them, but each group places itself higher than it is generally placed by others. The gradations of status are slight enough, and contestable enough, that there is no question of intermarriage not being permitted (see Ch. 2, Table 2.4). Within the Buddhist sacerdotal caste, the Vajrācāryas and Śākyas, by contrast, there are only these two caste sub-groups; thanks to the fact that only the Vajrācāryas may be domestic priests, their superior rank is clear and uncontested. However, the two sections do form what is unambiguously a single caste and are not endogamous sub-castes.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps these caste sub-groups would have developed into separate endogamous castes or sub-castes had the Newar micro-region not been so small and the population so relatively low. Had the Kathmandu Valley supported a much larger population at an early period, they might have developed, in Mandelbaum's terms (1970: i. 19), into linked but *endogamous* sub-castes, members of a *jāti*-cluster treated as one bloc by outsiders. Certainly, the identity of different Newar caste sub-groups springs from causes very similar to the bases of sub-caste difference given in Ghurye's (1932: 31) heterogeneous list: 'First, territorial or jurisdictional separateness; second, mixed origin; third, occupational distinction; fourth, some peculiarity in the technique of one and the same occupation; fifth, sectarian difference; sixth, dissimilarity of customs; and last, adventitious circumstances, suggesting certain nicknames.'

In Newari, all three levels, the caste, the sub-caste (where existing), and the caste sub-group are referred to either as *jāt* or (more politely and honorifically) as *thar*. Since *thar* is the more polite term, and is therefore generally used in self-reference, there is a slight tendency for it to be used more frequently of the smaller group, the caste sub-group, the distinction of which is more important for insiders (Gellner 1992: 64–8).

Although there are these caste sub-groups within the caste in many instances, it does not follow that there is an ideology of hypergamy, whether ranking clans and sub-castes as among north Indian Rajputs (Parry 1979) or consequent upon marriage, as among other north Indian groups (Raheja 1988a: 120) and among Parbatiyās (Bennett 1983; Czarnecka 1986). The ritual and

prestations required, as well as the feelings of the participants, all presuppose a marriage ideology of isogamy (Quigley 1986). Among the Śreṣṭhas, such isogamy coexists with the feeling of some sub-groups, especially the Jośīs, that they are superior to their non-Jośī affines because of their fallen *brāhmaṇ* status, and their wearing of the sacred thread.

The existence of these caste sub-groups led Louis Dumont (1964: 98) to the erroneous conclusion that the Newars lack castes properly speaking but rather are 'divided into status groups which may be absolutely (or practically) endogamous at the one end, and exogamous at the other'. Dumont based his argument on the very preliminary report of Furer-Haimendorf (1956). His conclusion was surprising, and has been criticized by most anthropologists of the Newars,<sup>30</sup> since he had rightly observed that the Newar system operated precisely on South Asian, Hindu principles. Furthermore, Dumont had astutely guessed that the basic Newar marriage ideal was isogamous, and he rightly observed that Vajrācāryas (Gubhāju, called 'Guwaju' by Furer-Haimendorf) and Śākyas (Bare) were not really separate castes, but sections of a single caste. None the less, misled by Furer-Haimendorf's focus on inter-caste marriage, and, I suspect, treating the Newars as if they were similar to the very different Parbatīyā Chetris, he concluded that the Newars were like the Nayars, in appearing Hindu and caste-like in relation to outsiders only.<sup>31</sup>

These different caste sub-groups are, then, often taken as castes. It is not only outside observers who have so taken them. They appear as such in many of the caste lists found in the historical chronicles referred to. And, as noted, local terminology does not distinguish between caste and caste sub-group. It is only by context, especially contexts of intermarriage and other relevant interactions, that the distinction becomes clear. The amalgamation of ten or more such groups into a single caste is a strategy characteristic of high castes such as the Śreṣṭhas and Tulādhār *et al.* As noted already, the low clean castes of level IV remain instead as small, separate, distinct, and homogeneous castes. This obliges them to marry over long distances.<sup>32</sup>

The Newar material makes obvious this new concept in the study of caste, a concept which may also find application elsewhere in the subcontinent. For example, the married Śaivite ascetics of the Nepalese hills, described by Bouillier (1979), are effectively a caste sub-group of this sort within the Parbatīyā Chetris. Caste sub-groups can start life as distinct castes, either based on a given profession or ritual role, or even, as many of their myths of origin assert, as immigrants from the plains who have assimilated to Newar society and culture. For example, the Baniyā caste sub-group of the Tulādhār *et al.* assert, and it is not implausible, that 'we came here about 300 years ago from Rajasthan, India. At that time we were Malvaris [Marwārīs], not Newars. In Nepal at that time there was a shortage of good vaidyas [Ayurvedic doctors], so when a Malla king fell sick he sent for one of our ancestors' (Durkin-Longley 1982: 188). Because of the small scale of the Malla kingdoms of the Kathmandu

Valley, groups which elsewhere might have remained or become separate castes, possibly even divided into endogamous sub-castes, here became a non-endogamous section of a larger caste. Religious or socio-religious identities which, with a larger population, would have supported separate castes or sub-castes, here were found within a single marriage circle and formed a joint caste made up of caste sub-groups.

### 3.3. The role of the king

It was suggested above that the existence of Hindu kingship makes the Newars' caste hierarchy particularly interesting. The position of numerous castes is legitimated by citing the invitation or decision of a king. As Greenwold (1975: 54) has written, 'there exists among the Newars, alongside the folk model of caste as a ritual system derived from the opposition of purity and impurity, another model which presents caste not as the result of the purity of the priest but of the power of the king'. I have already discussed the regulations of Sthiti Malla and Jang Bahadur Rana's Law Code. Several cases are well known to Newars of particular families or entire castes being raised in status by kings. As Greenwold notes (1975: 67), it is among competing castes or families who have *not* been raised in status, that the memory of the change is jealously guarded. An example from Lalitpur is an extended lineage of Rājibhaṇḍārīs, now accepted as *chatharīya* Śreṣṭhas; no Śreṣṭha remembers their humble, Maharjan origin in the village of Wāy (Chapagaon), but the local Śākya and Vajrācāryas delight in recalling it at every available opportunity. The entire caste of Rājibāhak (Putuwār, Duī) were raised, as discussed by Greenwold, in return for services to Prithvi Narayan Shah during his conquest of the Kathmandu Valley.<sup>33</sup>

The case of the Mānandhar (Sāymi), another of Greenwold's examples, is more contentious. In this case the 'fact' that they were once untouchable, or at least 'water-unacceptable' is widely known; but the reasons for their being raised vary. Some say Jang Bahadur raised them for pulling him out of a well, others that Bir Shamsheer did so because he had a Mānandhar mistress, yet others that they were raised for services during the war with Tibet in 1855. However, old caste lists, whether in chronicles (Lamshal 1966: 47) or the accounts of foreigners always—with the lone exception of Hamilton (1971: 36)—place them in bloc IV. It is possible that the stories have grown up because in Bhaktapur the whole of bloc IV is considered by some orthodox people not to be water-acceptable, so that Levy (1990: 82) refers to this entire group of castes as 'borderline-clean'; but why only Mānandhars should have become stigmatized in this way, and not Citrakārs, Rañjītkārs, or some other castes of this bloc, it is not possible to say in the present state of research.

In the late Rana period there was a long dispute between the Tulādhar *et al.* of Kathmandu and their Vajrācārya priests, which has been described in detail

by Rosser (1966). It was sparked off by the attempt of the Vajrācārya priests to make a public declaration that they would no longer accept boiled rice from their Tulādhār *et al.* patrons (*jajmān*), as they had sometimes done. This offended the rich and well-educated Tulādhārs, who justified their opposition in Buddhist terms. It is probable that the dispute went on longer, and was more divisive than it otherwise would have been, because the Rana authorities would not take a clear line, but delivered ambiguous judgements.

The king is not only the ultimate arbitrator of disputed rank; he is also the symbolic centre of the social and ritual systems. This is demonstrated in the layout of the city, in which, symbolically even if not actually (as, for example, in Bhaktapur), the palace occupies a central position. In festivals, as Levy (1990: 468) and Toffin (1993) have described, the king occupies a pivotal role and is represented by his sword, now that he is no longer present in person. At the funeral of a king, Padmagiri's chronicle records, as quoted above, that (representatives of) the 'thirty-six castes', i.e. all the castes of the hierarchy, should accompany the corpse to its cremation. Toffin (1986) has shown how high-caste Hindu funerals come closest today to imitating this maximal elaboration of specialist roles at death. These include the Karamjit (Bhāḥ), or Mahābrāhmaṇ, whose role is to assist in the rituals following the death, and to accept a meal including some of the pulverized skull of the dead person on the tenth or eleventh day. Karamjits may be a kind of *brāhmaṇ*, but traditional caste lists and local informants are unanimous in putting them low in the hierarchy (in bloc IV), which their interactions with other castes would seem to warrant; unlike the low-status Brāhmaṇs of Kangra who are deemed higher than Rajputs who will not accept water from them (Parry 1979: 106), in this Newar case *varṇa* classification does not override the interactional pattern.

In fact among the Newars, because of the existence of both Hindu and Buddhist 'summits', the application of *varṇa* categories, though made by locals and found in traditional sources, does not produce clear criteria of rank. Vajrācāryas and Śākyas are sometimes regarded as the Buddhists' *brāhmaṇs* and *kṣatriyas*, either respectively or jointly; but there are some of them who are supposed to be descended from monks of lower caste origin also. In bloc II, some Śreṣṭhas are thought to be fallen *brāhmaṇs* (Jośīs, Karmācāryas), others are considered *kṣatriyas* (e.g. Amātyas), and yet others are thought to be *vaiśyas*, but they all intermarry. Castes of blocs III and IV are generally thought to be *sūdras*.

The Kangra material is congruent with Nepal, on the other hand, on the position of the king. Parry (1979: 120) quotes Lyall, who wrote that 'The Raja was the fountain of honour, and could do as he liked'. He could raise individuals from one caste to another, and readmit to caste after a defilement. As Parry describes, the agreement of the local raja was seen as essential in the struggle of the Koli caste to be accepted as clean. Similarly, Dirks (1987: 284) writes of the south Indian 'little kingdom' of Pudukottai:



The caste system as a whole was ordered in relation to the king. Or rather, we should say that it was ordered in relation to kingship, as we have outlined it in terms not only of the person of the king but also the principles of honor, status, and order embodied by the king.

Today, in relation to caste the royal function has atrophied. This decline began even under the Ranas, with their attempt to fix in law what was formerly the prerogative of the king acting through his *paṇḍits* to decide. Since 1951 individuals have been free to abandon their traditional caste-ordained roles. Those castes who have public festival tasks identified as low and who are successful in modern education and commerce, the Mānandhars for instance, have hastened to do so. This is true *a fortiori* of those members of 'unclean' castes who have acquired education. Even high-status priestly castes such as the Vajrācāryas hope that their sons will not be priests. Small priestly caste sub-groups, such as the Karmācāryas, have virtually no one left who is able and willing to take up the role in Kathmandu and Lalitpur. Among the castes of bloc IV there are many who now pass as 'Śreṣṭha', and within many castes, caste sub-groups are being homogenized, many adopting the surname of the most prestigious sub-group (e.g. 'Tulādhār' among the Tulādhār *et al.*/Urāy).

#### 4. *Order within the Caste: Guthi, Kinship, and Household*

How much do all Newars share? It will be seen in subsequent chapters that there is considerable variation in marriage patterns. And although household size varies from caste to caste (lower castes tending to have smaller households), there are some fundamental principles of social organization, with associated values, that are held in common. These can be considered under the broad headings of *guthis*, kinship, and the household.

By tradition all Newar heads of households are members of a death *guthi*. (Lewis, p. 57 below, describes how even this is no longer so in every case among the highly educated, commercial caste sub-group, the Tulādhars; cf. p. 101.) Death *guthis* are socio-religious organizations of people of the same caste and based in the same locality, responsible for the proper cremation of all members and their dependants. As Quigley (1986) has argued, *guthi* membership, of this one *guthi* at least, though in many cases of other *guthis* as well, is a crucial marker of status and belonging for all Newars. *Guthis*, for whatever purpose, operate on the principle of the equality of all members tempered only by respect for seniority. For this reason, except in the case of certain devotional *guthis* set up for the worship, for example, of Karuṇāmaya (Matsyendranāth) at the beginning of each solar month, they are usually mono-caste.

All *guthis* have a tutelary deity who is worshipped before the regular (usually annual) feast. Sometimes *guthis* own land, gifted by previous members; today

this is often replaced by money in a bank, the interest being used to run the *guthi*. Death *guthis* usually lack endowments and all members make an annual or biannual contribution to the running expenses. The running of any *guthi* is the responsibility of a specified member or members and this rotates each year, or more frequently, so that everyone takes their turn in order of seniority.<sup>34</sup> Toffin describes the functioning of Citrakār *guthis* in great detail in Chapter 8 below. Much of what he says about Citrakār death *guthis* applies also to most other Newar castes. It is rare, however, for *guthis* to give loans or to regulate economic competition, except among very small castes such as the Citrakārs. This lack of economic co-operation is, as Quigley has remarked, in stark and dramatic contrast to the high degree of intra-caste cultural solidarity and unity among the Newars, of which *guthis* are a prime example.<sup>35</sup>

The second most important *guthi* for most Newars is the lineage deity *guthi*. Many castes, especially high castes, have given this up in recent years, continuing the annual worship of the lineage deity only in individual households or two or three closely related households, if at all. In the past, for high castes and middle castes, lineage deity worship was celebrated with several days of rituals and feasts, either once a year or twice a year. Of course, even in the past there were disputes, which if unresolved led to lineages splitting and no longer performing lineage deity worship together.

All Newars divide their agnatic kin into three broad categories, although they may use different terms to name them; and these three categories are distinguished primarily by the degree of mourning observed at death. That is to say, members of a given household must avoid eating until the cremation procession departs if someone of the furthest category has died. They must not observe festivals, wear hats (for men), or beautify themselves (for women) for a seven- or twelve-day period if someone of the intermediate category (with which lineage deity worship is observed) has died. The degrees of mourning within the closest category of kin depend on the individual's relationship to the dead person. For a deceased father, mother, or husband, mourning lasts for one year. For other close agnatic relations and for a deceased wife it usually lasts forty-five days. Women also observe four days for a death in their natal household and their husbands may observe a single day.<sup>36</sup>

When a lineage splits, the two resulting units are no longer obliged to observe twelve days' mourning (seven days in the case of Vajrācāryas and Śākya) for fellow members. What has changed in recent decades is that, except in a few cases where the lineage is still proud to demonstrate its solidarity, the advantages of simple and small-scale celebrations far outweigh any possible benefits which solidarity with a wider range of kin might bring. With the new political, economic, and legal order of post-1951 Nepal, there is little chance of inheriting land or property from lineage mates without male issue. There is also less likelihood of needing the backing of a lineage in times of hardship or disputes (and less likelihood of their giving it in any case).

The joint family has not declined to nearly the same extent as the lineage. It still has a standing in law. The use of wills has effectively limited the rights of the wider patrilineage in property, but it has not abrogated the traditional right of all sons to inherit equal shares. Under Nepalese law a man may not dispose of joint family property without his sons' written agreement. And indeed most Newars (Dyahlā are an exception, see Ch. 9) continue to favour the patrilineal joint family in spite of the fact that splits often occur earlier in the cycle, and more frequently, than in the past. Quigley's research (1985a) showed that three-quarters of Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas, and nearly half of the Khadgīs, live in some kind of joint family.

Marriage is almost invariably viri- and patrilocal (again the Dyahlā are a partial exception). The position of the man who lives with his wife and her parents is today considered contemptible and risible. Nowadays Newars use the Nepali term *ghar jwāñ* for this, in place of the older *dolāji* or *dulāji*. Interestingly, the latter term was also used in the Malla period when a Newar man without sons left his property to his unmarried daughter; she was then specified as the *dolāji*. In order to do this, and avoid his property going to his brothers and other patrilineal relatives, the father had to sign a special document and have the agreement of the king. The Shah dynasty recognized this as a specifically Newar custom and allowed it to continue (M. C. Regmi 1970).

Since 1975 Nepalese law specifies that an unmarried daughter over 35 is entitled to an equal share with her brothers.<sup>37</sup> In practice, Newars follow the older custom: a woman inherits only if she remains unmarried and has no brothers. If, as occasionally happens, a woman with brothers refuses to marry, she continues to live with them, or one of them, and it would at present be unthinkable for her to demand a share and live alone. Furthermore, where there are no sons a man or his widow can write a will leaving their estate even to a married daughter or to the wife's relatives (Bennett 1979: 36–7). Before this law, the property of a family without male issue passed to the nearest agnatic kin (unless they were Newars, had an unmarried daughter, and had adopted the *dolāji* procedure described above). This was no doubt one of the material incentives which lay behind the greater solidarity of lineages in the past, both among the Newars and among other groups.

Since women do not inherit a share of the ancestral property, Newar men consider it their religious duty to see that their sisters and daughters are given a dowry, married properly, provided with moral support thereafter, and invited, with children, and occasionally their husband, to feasts. A woman's children are entitled to long-term ritual and material support from their mother's brother.

Sons are not supposed to separate while their father is alive. If a son demands his share the father can in theory refuse, and the courts will support him (Bennett 1979: 30). In practice, a father often agrees, if his son is vigorous and insists. In that case the father and all the sons are assigned equal shares. In

many cases a single departing brother's share is small enough that in the normal run of things he will have a material incentive to stay in the joint family. However, if he has a source of income, for example a salary, much greater than that of his brothers, he, his wife, and his children, will often be better off if they separate and do not have to share it with others. A mother is assigned a share also if the father is dead. In that case it is inherited by the brother she chooses to live with.

There is one case in which no one will criticize a young or middle-aged man for separating from his father, and that is if the father brings in a second wife. The simple statement, 'There was a stepmother (*cīdhimā du*),' is enough to exonerate any such separation from one's father. A stepmother is likely to give birth to sons herself, and it is thought only natural that she will favour her own children over those of the senior wife. Thus a young man has both material incentives (the need to separate before new coparceners entitled to an equal share are born) and emotional reasons for an early separation. Another situation in which Newars find separation from a living father at least understandable is if a sister divorces or separates from her husband and comes to live with her children in her natal home. It is expected that she will receive greater love and consideration from her parents than her brothers' wives, and this does normally seem to be so. Thus the natural cycle whereby the in-marrying daughter-in-law can expect eventually to take over responsibility in the household from her mother-in-law is interrupted.

Household splits among Newars are very commonly acrimonious. Newars compare their own system unfavourably with that of the Parbatiyās, though in fact among them too there are often long and bitter disputes occasioned by partitions that one or other party believed to be unfair. Newars frequently divide the parental house in proportion, building new staircases, partition walls, and separate entrances. Consequently they live next door to their nearest agnatic kin with whom, in a remarkable number of cases, they are not on speaking terms.

The splitting of a household does not necessarily occur all at once. This is possible because Newars themselves expect a number of different things from a joint household: all members of a joint household share a single hearth or cooking stove (*bhutū*), they eat together sitting in order of seniority at all festivals (*nakhah*), they share an identical ritual status when births and deaths occur in related families, and the head of the household belongs to most important *guthis* on behalf of the whole household. Ideally all income is shared and all expenditure is decided on by the household head, either alone, or with other senior males, with the advice of senior women.

R. P. Pradhan (1986: 28) has suggested that, rather than coresidence, 'a definition by right of access to the kitchen (for women) and to property (for men) is closer to the Newar conception of what constitutes a household'. It is certainly true that where a joint family owns more than one house, women often

cook in both places and, for security's sake, members of the family always sleep wherever the family has property (i.e. a young male will always sleep in the shop if the family has one). The crucial marker of being together is that feast days are observed together in one place. For this reason all married women must be present for feasts, and not at their natal homes.

A man who decides to separate from his parents and brothers because he does not wish to share his income with them can simply move out without demanding his share of the property. With the boom in salaried employment over the last twenty years, some of it (in foreign missions and agencies) very well paid by Nepalese standards, the opportunities to do this have certainly increased. Brothers who run a business of any size are more likely to stay together, since their commercial and managerial clout is stronger together than it would be if they divided. Another transitional stage to full separation may occur when brothers set up separate stoves within the house and cook and conduct their affairs separately. Sometimes this is done amicably, in other cases with considerable friction.

Within the household all Newars share broadly similar forms of deference, younger males bowing down to older men on specified ritual occasions, women showing respect to older women and men. Among many Newar castes, in-married daughters-in-law have to bow down to the feet of all senior men and women of the household before eating; interestingly, among the urban Śreṣṭhas, as among Parbatīyās, they have to do this only to their own husband and mother-in-law.

The position of Newar women has, then, much in common with that of Parbatīyā and north Indian Hindu women. However, for most Newars, pollution beliefs, as they affect women, are less severely interpreted (Newar Brāhmaṇs and *chatharīya* Śreṣṭhas are an exception here). Marriages among the Newars are frequently made near at hand, so that contact can easily be maintained with the natal household (the differences between Newar castes in this respect are discussed in the respective chapters below). Childbirth is not as polluting as in north India and traditional birth attendants are not degraded Untouchables forced into the work by economic necessity (Jeffrey and Jeffrey 1993) but proud specialists who consider their work a religious duty (*dharma*).

There is, however, considerable variation within the Newars in the degree of freedom women have to divorce and remarry (Gellner 1991; and see Ch. 5). High-caste women are much more restricted in this respect than Maharjan women; and the women of some peripheral settlements seem to have much more freedom than most Newar women (see Ishii's discussion in Ch. 4 below). For interpreters of Newar society it is in fact a controversial question whether Newar women deserve the reputation for relatively high status and autonomy that they have among their Parbatīyā neighbours.

Just as the Newars share a common language with considerable dialectal variation, so they share a kinship terminology (summarized in the Appendix)

with considerable variations in detail and usage. There is also variation in the degree to which Hindi and Nepali loans have taken over from Tibeto-Burman terms. It does not appear to be entirely predictable when and where this will happen.

For the most part both the terminology and the system are north Indian. In one's own generation all cousins, whether cross or parallel, are equated with one's full brothers and sisters. As in north India, though this is equally if not more typical of Tibeto-Burman terminology, the father's brothers are assimilated to the father, and mother's sisters to the mother, but are distinguished by age. Similarly the MZH is equated with the FB, and the FBW with the MZ.<sup>38</sup>

Marriage is forbidden with known agnatic kin, and with consanguines in the female lines (not just the mother's patriline) up to seven generations. The rule is generally cited as forbidding marriage for 'seven generations' on either side. The frequency with which this rule is cited surely has something to do with the fact that it was once supported by government action. For instance, M. C. Regmi (1989) quotes a document from 1805 in which the tax-collector for Lalitpur is instructed to impose fines on any Newar who marries a lower caste girl and eats from her hand, and on any Newar who marries a girl related within five or six generations, while falsely claiming that she was related only in seven or eight generations. In practice, however, when the links are made through females, only about five generations are usually remembered.

As in north India, both mother's brother and father's sister owe lifelong ritual assistance in clearly defined roles to their sister's or brother's children at their life-cycle rituals. This is true for all Newar castes; and on many occasions, especially for low castes excluded from the specialist services received by middle and high castes, the mother's brother acts as a priest or barber. A man's material obligations to his sister extend to her children. In fact, the prestations expected of a mother's brother are quite onerous in financial terms, a point informants stress when the subject comes up.

Although the Newars have undergone a long assimilation to north Indian culture and norms, traces of a symmetrical, prescriptive Dravidian-type system remain in the terminology. In the first place, there is the equation of a child by a sibling of the same sex with one's own child (distinguished only by the diminutive suffix *-cā*). Secondly, there is the equation of MB and FZH, as well as, in Pyangaon, of MBW and FZ. The former equivalence, common among Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups, is also found among the Pahari of the Indian Himalayas studied by Berreman (1963: 413), as among other groups in the process of Sanskritization or influenced by contact with non-Hindu groups.

There is no question today of the Newars practising cross-cousin marriage. They consider it incest. There is no way, in other words, that a Newar's MB (*pāju*) can be his WF (*sasaḥ bā*) and the very suggestion would be shocking. Certain small groups are sometimes accused of practising cross-cousin

marriage (males marrying MBD): these include the Pyangaon Maharjans, the Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas, and the Vyañjankārs of Lalitpur. The reality is that, since they cannot establish unions with the reference groups whose status they claim or aspire to (other Maharjans, other Śreṣṭhas, and Lalitpur Maharjans respectively), these groups are forced, in the search for brides, to marry more closely in the female line than they otherwise might. In fact it is likely that there are unions of similar closeness among many of the small castes of bloc IV, as well as among the Rājopādhyāyas (see Ch. 6). But the accusations against Pyangaon Maharjans, Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas, and Lalitpur Vyañjankārs are a way of saying: they are like Tamangs in their marriage practices, and this makes them unacceptable partners for us. In fact, there are other cases, less well known, where, for want of brides, cross-cousin marriage is documented: that of the Thaku Juju Mallas, who claim, but are generally denied, *chathariya* Śreṣṭha status (K. P. Malla 1980: 28). The Thaku Jujus also gave their daughters in marriage to Rājopādhyāyas (ibid.). Cross-cousin marriage is in fact common among the ruling Rana and Shah aristocracy, a fact Newars are themselves aware of, and it is permitted to Chetris and Thakuris (MBD, but not FZD);<sup>39</sup> but this does not affect the Newars' view of it. Among larger castes, as will be seen in the chapters below, such shortage of brides is not a problem; but different castes adopt varying solutions in the search for allies of similar status.

## 5. *From Lévi to Levy: The Place of the Newars in South Asia*

The interpretation of the Newars' history, kinship terminology, and culture is a controversial matter about which scholars, including the contributors to the present volume, are not in agreement. Some crucial parts of that debate have been published elsewhere, so it is necessary to summarize briefly the main points. It will be taken up again in Chapter 10.

Just how far should one go in interpreting current Newar society in terms of the process of Sanskritization and Hinduization away from a 'tribal' past? Sylvain Lévi's aphorism—'Nepal is India in the making' (probably the most used quotation in Nepalese studies)—has been cited once again above. But how should it be understood? The Newars were undoubtedly once 'pre-Hindu', as were all inhabitants of the subcontinent; or rather, their distant ancestors, who probably did not call themselves 'Newar', were 'pre-Hindu'. But how relevant is this for the understanding of contemporary social organization?

Among those who have seen it as highly relevant are two of the most acute anthropological observers of Newar society, Michael Allen and Gérard Toffin. Thus Allen (1982: 207 n. 27) writes:

Contemporary Newar society could also be described as exhibiting a number of tribal features. The following are especially worth noting:

1. *Jat* that are structured in conformity with lineage principles, especially in regard to property and leadership. Most *jat* are highly corporate groups with a common estate in land and buildings. *Jat* members have a strong sense of solidarity and even at the highest level participate in joint activities.
2. *Jat* leadership is well developed and analogous to that found in many tribal communities. I refer here to such formal offices as *thakāli* and *aju* (New.).
3. Dietary customs of a tribal type, especially meat-eating and alcohol-drinking.

Toffin, for his part, as noted above, has done more fieldwork on the Newars than anyone else, as well as on the Tamangs. In *Société et religion chez les Néwar du Népal* he describes how, in spite of their being regarded as similar by other Newars, he could find no direct connection between the Swāgumi (the inhabitants of Pyangaon where he did his first fieldwork) and the Pahari, a peripheral quasi-Newar group. There is, no evidence, for example, that the Swāgumi are descended from the Pahari.

[M]y study of the Pahari, following that of the Swāgumi, and itself followed shortly afterwards by study of the Balāmī and Putuwār [Rājābhak], made me aware of the existence at the edge of the Kathmandu Valley of a whole series of marginal groups whose members, although considered Newar, are relatively poorly assimilated to the Newars. Do these groups represent an old strictly Newar tribal substratum which was pushed gradually back towards the edges of the Valley and in which it should be possible to discover the traces of a putative 'primitive' social organization? Or are they rather populations of different ethnic origin who have progressively Newarized themselves through contact with the people of the Kathmandu Valley, while conserving none the less certain distinctive characteristics? The question remains open. My data allow me to assert only that there are no fundamental differences today in the social structures of the Pahari, Balāmī, Putuwār, Swāgumi, and those of the great majority of Newar Jyāpu [Maharjan] peasant farmers. All the same, Tibeto-Burman traits are still more marked among the former than among the latter, particularly in the domain of kinship.<sup>40</sup>

Later on Toffin characterizes the social organization of Pyangaon as an attempted synthesis between 'local exigencies, based on a type of social organization that one can describe as tribal, and the Hindu values of the caste system' (ibid. 157).

While unsure about the origin of peripheral Newar groups, Toffin has no such doubts about Maharjans. In his conclusion, he writes:

The Swāgumi of Pyangaon, as well as rural Jyāpu more generally, belong to that old tribal substratum on which Newar civilization was built . . . These notions of substratum (Tibeto-Burman) and centres of Indianness are however, at the present time, only models; I mean by this that they are ideal types which allow us to reconstitute a long historical process without thereby aiming to reflect empirical reality in its entirety. In reality the opposition is markedly less distinct: there has been synthesis, sometimes simple juxtaposition, of layers of different origin, both in the villages and the cities. There are moreover numerous intermediate solutions in which symmetrical and asymmetrical, Tibeto-Burman and Indian elements, blend together more or less



harmoniously. Any attempt to formulate unambiguous distinctions (*tout schématisme*) would be out of place: Jyāpu farmers have been in contact with Indian culture for several centuries, from which they have borrowed, as we have seen, numerous traits; and despite their greater proximity to Indian values, there are also elements of the socio-religious life of high-caste Hindus (and Buddhists) which are authentically Newar, belonging to the most ancient layer. (Toffin 1984: 587)

He concludes:

Indian elements and tribal traits are today closely combined at every level of social organization. (Ibid. 589)

I myself have questioned this approach, arguing that the Newars, as a whole, are the very opposite of a tribe in the South Asian sense: they are essentially urban, not rural, and based on a complex, hierarchical division of labour (Gellner 1986, 1991, 1992: 307–12). Maharjan peasant farmers have in fact been ‘in contact’ with Hindu culture for a millennium and a half, even if those of Pyangaon have very likely come into contact only in the past few centuries.

The search for tribal traits among the Newars reflects the perspective of the dominant Parbatiyās, unconsciously adopted by foreign researchers, and parallels the attempt to separate out Dravidian and Aryan features in south India. All too often a crude ‘layer cake’ model of Newar culture and society is adopted. The top, Hindu layer being scraped off, the ‘tribal’, ‘animist’, ‘ancient’ substratum is allegedly revealed underneath. Sometimes an intermediate Buddhist layer is posited; as N. J. Allen (1986: 85) notes, such a ‘three-phase conceptualization of Newar history is of course extremely crude’. Toffin himself, as the passage quoted shows, is far from adopting a crude and static version of such models. Clearly Newar society as a whole has changed over 1,500 years. One cannot simply assume that any part of it—whether Maharjans, low castes, villagers, or ‘local tradition’—has remained preserved in aspic.

This is not to rule out of court questions about long-term historical continuities. Indeed it is possible that there are ‘tribal’ survivals in Newar culture, although it should be borne in mind that the very term ‘tribal’ is problematic, even vaguer than the designation ‘Hindu’. Be that as it may, except in the case of language, especially kin terms, it is much harder to demonstrate long-term survivals than is normally assumed. As argued above, Newar society is a paradigm case of caste society, not a peripheral, half-tribal exception.

How far do these considerations invalidate the concern of Allen and Toffin to identify a tribal heritage in the Newars’ social organization and culture? How far are they compatible with such a search? How far is the tribal origin question essential for the understanding of Newar society? These are questions of interpretation that readers will have to resolve for themselves. The present volume, it is hoped, provides ample evidence to go on.

Two aspects of the model proposed by Toffin have been taken up by Ishii (Ch. 4, below). He shows, by the analysis of marriage circles, that one really

needs to posit three types of Newar settlement in the Valley, not just a simple village–city dichotomy. Furthermore, he provides the most detailed and sophisticated figures yet on the controversial question of widowhood and divorce among the Newars. Ishii also shows that whereas the balance of prestations between wife-givers and wife-takers favours the wife-givers among the Maharjans of Satungal, it favours the wife-takers among the Śreṣṭhas. This fascinating fact, so meticulously demonstrated, could be interpreted in line with Toffin's theory of the greater Indianization of the higher Newar castes. But it needs to be borne in mind that such differential patterns between lower and higher castes are equally to be found in India itself.

Alongside Toffin's invocation of a tribal heritage, there is in his rich and magisterial book, another theory, that Newar society is pervaded by (*innervé*), and structured by, religion, and that the king and royal power have a centrality not found in India. In this connection he invokes Hocart. Although put in very different language, and seeking its theoretical underpinnings rather from Fustel de Coulanges, Levy's approach in *Mesocosm* is rather similar. Quigley also began a discussion of Newar urbanism with Fustel (1984: ch. 7; and Ch. 10 below). All these perspectives put aside questions of origin, and ask: What is the best framework for the understanding of the contemporary social and religious system?

Toffin (1984: 593) calls the presence of religion at every level of the social structure 'the central theme of [his] study'. As he shows, kin, clan, stages of the life cycle, *guthi*, and caste are all articulated through religion, which is used both to oppose and to combine units of the same order. At the centre of the system is 'the complementary opposition of sacrificer and patron of the sacrifice . . . Among the Newars, as in traditional Hindu society, this opposition is based on the Brāhman/Kṣatriya relation' (ibid. 596). Elsewhere, criticizing the remarks of Dumont quoted above, he insists that 'Newar castes form a system . . . and this system is profoundly Indian' (ibid. 222). But in one respect, Toffin believes that Newar society differs from India, and that is in the role given to royal power (cf. Greenwold 1975). He argues that Hocart's king-centred model of caste works precisely for Buddhist-influenced peripheral areas such as Sri Lanka and Nepal. He calls the 'centrality of power . . . the key notion of Newar civilization, perhaps even of Nepalese civilization in general' (ibid. 592). Toffin suggests that this greater strength of the king in Nepal may perhaps explain Nepal's unity and lack of communalism by comparison with India. Quigley (1991, 1993), on the other hand, has argued that Hocart's theory is more valid than Dumont's for caste in general, and therefore, by implication, that the Newars *do not* differ from other Hindus in the prominent role and religious value given to the king.

Levy, in his monumental *Mesocosm*, is not concerned to search out tribal origins; and he adopts the language of American cultural anthropology rather than British or French social anthropology. None the less, he comes to very

similar conclusions. For him the city of Bhaktapur is 'representative of the kinds of places Islam tried to transform in India' (Levy 1990: 619). In other words, it is a complex, polytheistic, agrarian city, whose cohesion and stability is maintained largely by cultural means, a city meant to represent a local mesocosm of the Hindu universe. With this view of Newar civilization we are back at Lévi's 'India in the making'.

Whichever perspective is adopted for understanding it, the traditional Newar caste order is, all agree, in a rapid process of change. Ishii (1978: 527) has noted that 'intercaste cooperation and interdependence are in a process of collapse . . . [A]t the same time intracaste cohesion seems to be increasing.' This is the process Dumont (1980: 227) called 'substantialization', the replacement of an interdependent, continually segmented hierarchy by competing, internally egalitarian blocs. A similar process is identified, encouraged by their religious identity, in the case of the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas (Ch. 7).

As for whether Newar cultural nationalism will have significant political reverberations, the two editors of the present collection have disagreed (Gellner 1986; Quigley 1987). It is, in any case, certain that the new political and economic order of Nepal post-1951, and *a fortiori* post-1990, has changed the ground rules for the Newars' internal social organization. Whether in terms of kin, clan, *guthi*, or caste, irrevocable and unpredictable changes have been set in motion.

The contributors to this volume, while agreeing on the value of such a collective enterprise, by no means share precisely the same outlook, either on the interpretation of the 'traditional' order or on the precise direction of the manifold changes. This is, then, another sense in which Newar hierarchies are contested: in their interpretation by scholars, whether local or foreign. The chapters of this book represent not an artificially imposed unanimity, but a collective contribution to an ongoing debate, a debate that, in different ways, the Newars themselves are also carrying on.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank N. J. Allen, D. P. Martinez, R. Parkin, D. Quigley, J. Pfaff-Czarnecka, and J. Whelpton for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.
2. See Marriott (1976), Appadurai (1986), Quigley (1993), and Raheja (1988*b*) for representative critiques, the latter providing a useful literature review.
3. For a similar kind of account in an authoritative recent history of India from 1757 to 1857, see Bayly (1988: ch. 5: 'Peasant and Brahmin: Consolidating "traditional" society'). For an even more radical attack on the anthropological notion of a *jajmānī* 'system' as *the* traditional form of economic organization in South Asia, see Fuller (1991).
4. It is part of Dirks's (1987) argument for the relevance of his analysis that it is based on the only princely state in Tamil Nadu. The rulers of Nepal were treated differently from the princely states, having much greater freedom of action and

being allowed, for example, an embassy in London from the 1930s. This fact is of particular importance to the Nepalese today, who wish to disarm in advance any possible Indian claim to Nepal.

5. Areas of Tibetan Buddhism on the northern fringes of South Asia, and the reintroduced neo-Buddhism of Ambedkarite ex-Untouchables, mainly in Maharashtra, hardly invalidate this generalization.
6. On this in Nepal, see Nepali (1965: 35–69), R. P. Pradhan (1986: ch. 10), and Toffin (1990: 110–14; 1992a).
7. See Burghart (1984) and Gellner (1986).
8. See Toffin (1975b; 1984: 585–600), Gellner (1986, 1991), Quigley (1987). See also Grandin (1989: ch. 6).
9. For further details on this, and on language politics, see Gellner (1986).
10. The best introduction in English to the history of the Kathmandu Valley is Slusser (1982: chs. 2–4).
11. Nepalese authors who use ‘ethnic group’ as a synonym of ‘racial group’ are therefore right to deny that the Newars are one. If one allows cultural and/or linguistic bases of ethnic identity, however, as is done here, the Newars are indeed an ethnic group.
12. Cf. Slusser (1982: 72b). The standard source for Licchavi inscriptions is D. V. Vajracharya (1973). For the same inscriptions in English, see D. R. Regmi (1983) and for an extended critique of the latter, see K. P. Malla (1985c).
13. In fact the term ‘Thakuri’ is a misnomer: although applied by late chronicles to this period, it was never used by the rulers of the period themselves. For this reason historians such as Slusser (1982) and Petech (1984) prefer the name ‘Transitional period’. However, since the term is still widely used by Nepalese writers, I retain it here.
14. See Lamshal (1966: 28), B. C. Sharma (1968: 16), Hasrat (1970: 52), and Wright (1972: 172).
15. For discussion of the Nayar analogy, and its relation to images of Newar women’s ‘freedom’, see Gellner (1991).
16. For details see Slusser (1982: 54–61) and D. V. Vajracharya (1989).
17. I have corrected Hodgson’s translation (see Hasrat 1970: 55–6), following Cambridge Univ. MS Add. 1160, though retaining the numerals he added. Hasrat copied the English version of this chronicle from Hodgson’s Papers (vol. xviii, pp. 15 ff.), the translation presumably having been made by Hodgson together with his *paṇḍits*. The footnotes in Hasrat are notes by Hodgson himself in the margin of the manuscript, though this fact is nowhere recorded by Hasrat.
18. For a list of these visits, see Gutschow and Basukala (1987: 149).
19. See Petech (1984: 174, 205) and Slusser (1982: 318–21). See Toffin (1979a, 1993a) for detailed examinations of the relationship between royalty and the pantheon.
20. See Gellner (1987: 395–7) on Siddhi Narasiṃha’s attempt to Hinduize the (Śākya) members of the *bahī* monasteries. See Locke (1980: 313, 339) for Śrī Nivās’s rules of 1675, which excluded low castes from fasting during the month of Kārtik in Būgadyah’s temple, Bungamati.
21. Interestingly, emigrants from Bhaktapur, in the east of the Valley, predominate in the *west* of Nepal, whereas emigrants from Kathmandu and Lalitpur, in the west of the Valley, predominate in the *east* of Nepal (emigrants from Lalitpur are also

- frequent in Arughat and Tansen in west Nepal). For dialect evidence of this pattern, see D. R. Shakya (1990). Long before 1768 Newar merchants had been invited to settle in Gorkha by Prithvi Narayan's ancestor, Ram Shah (reigned 1606–34), who wished to break into the Tibet trade (Stiller 1973: 27; Hasrat 1970: 112).
22. See Burghart (1984: 118–19), Gellner (1986: 124–5), and Hutt (1988: 32–4).
  23. At least this is how Newar Brāhmaṇs remember it. See below, p. 191.
  24. On the concomitant emergence of the idea of Nepal as a nation state, see Burghart (1984).
  25. See also Whelpton's (1991: 216–20) very useful discussion, where he argues, against Höfer, that the Law Code, though demonstrating openness to modern methods, was thoroughly traditional in content and conception.
  26. See Burghart (1978: 528), Whelpton (1991: 9–13), and Quigley (1993: 114–41) and in Ch. 10 below.
  27. For extensive discussion of this distinction, see Gellner (1992).
  28. There is a slight difference in that he loses one level by amalgamating high-caste Śreṣṭhas (Chathariyas) and Brāhmaṇs, but gains one by putting the Rājibāhak (Putuwār) in a level of their own between levels IV and V.
  29. Because of a famous dispute in the 1920s, Kathmandu Vajrācāryas have become reluctant to marry Śākya at all, but this has not affected the situation in other cities (see below and Ch. 7).
  30. See Greenwold (1975: 49–50), M. R. Allen (1982: 198; 1987: 93), Toffin (1984: 222), Quigley (1986: 93), and Webster (1993; forthcoming).
  31. Dumont's formulation (1964: 98) was not without ambiguity. The passage cited and criticized by both Greenwold (1975: 49) and M. R. Allen (1982: 198) is in fact making the quite correct point that the Newars as a whole are not a caste, though they may appear as a caste in relation to Parbatīyās; they are rather a 'population' (by which he presumably meant an ethnic group). Dumont then moves on in the next paragraph to make the statement I have quoted which claims that even *within* the Newar 'conglomerate' there are only 'wider and narrower status groups' whose 'global image' displays a 'somewhat pyramidal aspect'. Dumont correctly recognized that anagamy, marriage in which the woman is of higher status than the man, and the children of the union are thereby of higher status than the father, is relevant only within the Śreṣṭhas, and also between them and Maharjans. These are points in the hierarchy where the boundaries are more than usually fluid and contestable (see Toffin 1984: 286; and Ch. 3 below).
  32. For these service castes Hodgson used the term *ekthariya*, 'having one *thar*' (Chattopadhyay 1980: 89), presumably on the model of the *chathariya* and *pāñcithariya* divisions of the Śreṣṭhas. Unlike these latter terms, *ekthariya* is not nowadays in general use, but it makes sense: these castes have no caste sub-groups (*thar*) but are formed from a single one.
  33. See Wright (1972: 227), as well as other chronicles not cited by Greenwold, such as Lamshal (1966: 115), B. C. Sharma (1969: 13), and Hasrat (1970: 90). However, all these accounts do not explicitly say that Prithvi Narayan raised the Rājibāhak, but only that he kept both the Rājibāhak and the Khadgī who saved him after a failed attack on Kirtipur 'close to his person'. On the Rājibāhak, see also Toffin (1981c).

34. There is a considerable literature on *guthis*. In addition to the standard ethnographies, Nepali (1965) and Toffin (1984), one should see Quigley (1985*b*), Gellner (1992: ch. 8), and Ishii (forthcoming).
35. Quigley (1985*a*: 40). One can contrast this with the relatively high level of economic co-operation within occupational castes and *birādari* in Muslim Old Delhi (Goodfriend 1973: 136).
36. For more detailed information on kin categories and mourning rules, see Quigley (1984: 172–4) and Gellner (1992: 205–9).
37. Between 1923 and 1975 an unmarried woman over 35 was entitled to half the share of her brothers, provided she remained unmarried and did not live with her sisters (M. C. Regmi 1976*b*). On inheritance in Nepalese law, and in particular on the position of women, see Bennett (1979) and Gilbert (1992).
38. For kin term abbreviations, see Appendix.
39. On cross-cousin marriage among Chetris, see Doherty (1974), and in the far west of Nepal, Krause (1980). The 1854 Law Code permitted MBD and MZD marriage even to Brāhmaṇs; evidence from 1831 shows Jaisi Brāhmaṇs of Sallyan petitioning for (and being granted) royal assent to their decision to abandon MBD marriages (Höfer 1979: 165–6).
40. Toffin (1984: 19–20). In another article (1992*b*), relating more recently gathered data, Toffin describes how the Pahari themselves remember the Swāgumi's Pahari origins and attempted to establish marriage relations with them in the recent past, but were rudely rebuffed.

# Buddhist Merchants in Kathmandu: The Asan Twāḥ Market and Urāy Social Organization

*Todd T. Lewis*

## *Introduction*

This chapter provides an overview of Newar society in Asan Twāḥ, Kathmandu, and of the Urāy, a large merchant caste which has been prominent in the business and cultural life of Kathmandu for over 400 years. The ethnographic portraiture of Asan in Section 1 presents Newar bazaar society from shifting vantage-points and is intended as a contribution to Newar urban studies. Examining Newar society in terms of spatially defined urban units and with demographic measures is necessary to comprehend this market-place's diversity and, moreover, for grasping the human geography of the largest Newar cities today. In Section 2 the focus narrows to the Urāy and surveys the social institutions that organize the caste's public and private existence. A description of the inter-caste relations that so define the traditional life-style of these affluent Kathmandu lay Buddhists is the theme of Section 3. Section 4 is a short concluding section with reflections on the Urāy in the ethnohistory of Kathmandu as a Malla polity.

Several points of definition and orientation must be noted from the outset. The focal social group in this chapter is the Urāy. However, it is based upon research primarily concerned with the largest sub-group, the Tulādhars of Asan, Naradevī, and Jhwā Bāhāḥ (T. Lewis 1984). As noted below, all nine Urāy sub-groups intermarry so that defined by the exchange of women there is in fact only one marriage circle. None the less, patrilineage boundaries are important social markers, men are the primary public figures, and this essay on Urāy social organization is necessarily patrifocal.



## 1. *Asan Twāḥ*

### 1.1. Market and community

A place known to most Newars, Asan Twāḥ is the chief market in north-east Kathmandu, its centre a crossroads where six lanes meet.<sup>1</sup> Exceptionally vibrant, enlivened by intensive business activities, home to diverse castes and communities, Asan is one of the great Newar examples of a traditional Asian bazaar.<sup>2</sup>

Asan is one of the major markets in Kathmandu city, with Maru Twāḥ, Naradevī, and Indracok the only traditional centres of similar importance. Tulādhār, Śreṣṭha, and other *sāhujis* ('honourable merchants') who live there are predominantly middleman retailers. For sale in Asan is the largest range of merchandise available in modern Nepal.

Asan's central trade is in rice and edible oils from the Valley and hills, foodgrains and products from India (processed foods, hardware, electronics), and in consumer goods imported from the outside world, especially Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan. There are also many *sāhujis* who trade in goods produced by local artisans working in brass, copper, iron, stainless steel, cotton, and straw. A few entrepreneurs have ventured into the small-scale



PLATE 1. A quiet afternoon in central Asan Twāḥ, Kathmandu (1982). (T. T. Lewis)



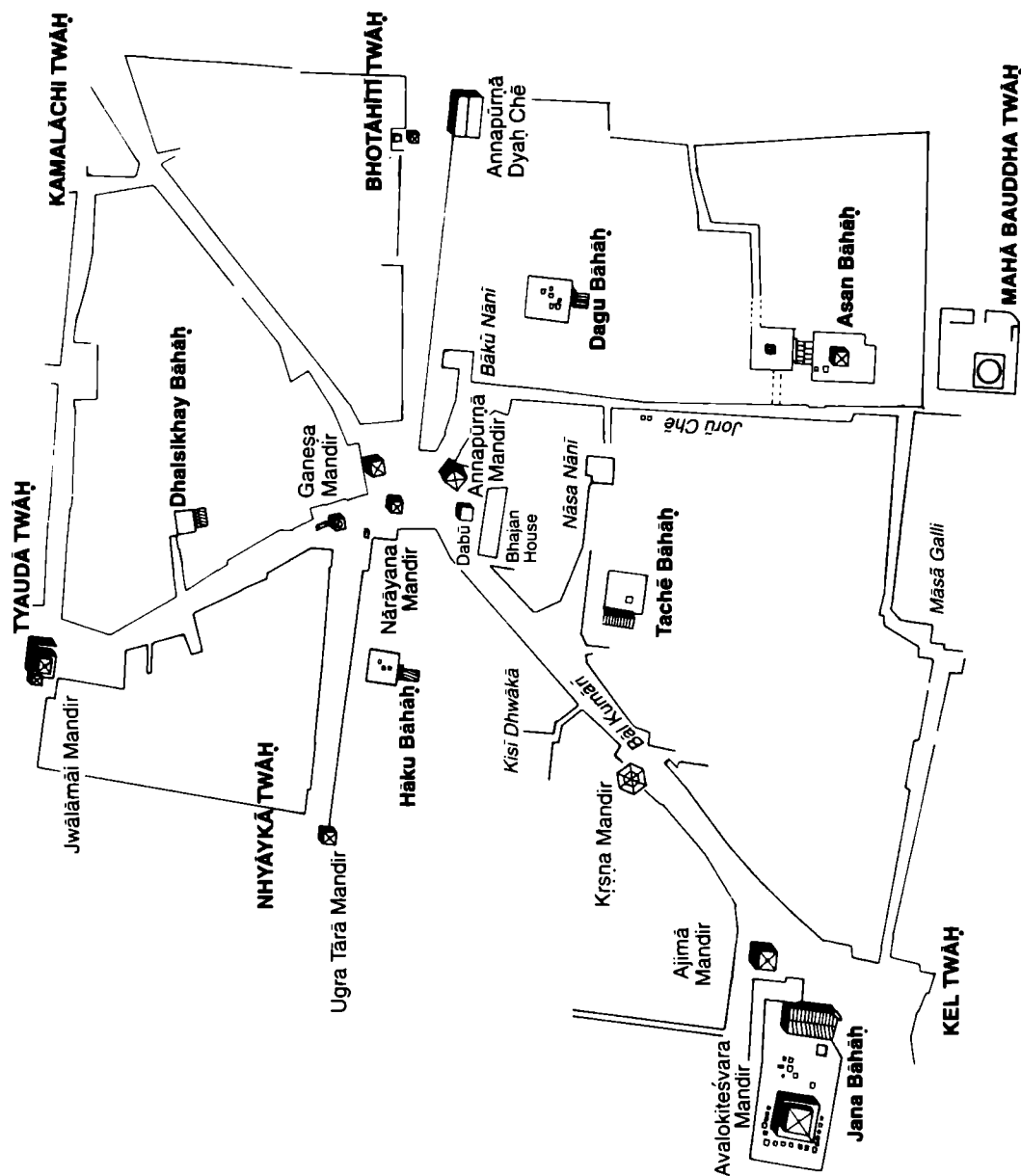


FIG. 2.1. Asan localities and landmarks

production of 'ready-made' clothing, umbrellas, and spectacles. The most successful Asan merchants have extended their businesses outside their old bazaar to modern 'supermarkets' and to New Road, a broad storefront street south of Asan built by Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer after the earthquake of 1934.

Asan Twāḥ's proximity to Kathmandu's wholesale grain market,<sup>3</sup> the lower overhead costs of the resident shopkeepers, and the concentration of capital wealth available for family business ventures have kept its merchants at the forefront of Kathmandu's commercial life. The market's pre-eminence has recently waned somewhat, however, despite the Valley's increasing population and the import business as a whole developing exponentially in the last decade.<sup>4</sup> Asan's dominance has also ebbed as new shopping centres have emerged and urban planners have changed the city's traffic flow in ways detrimental to the old bazaar.

Above and beyond its market, Asan is a residential neighbourhood with over 600 families of forty-two different castes. The variation in the living circumstances of residents is immense: some families live right on the major bustling lanes of the city; others live in courtyards which also vary greatly in size, from the largest *nani cok* (which may have over thirty houses) with large open areas, to the very small courtyards which are little more than small open gaps between houses. In Asan, wealth and family size do not always correlate with the quality of living conditions; the overall population density is very high, averaging over eighty people per acre (Thapa and Tiwari 1977: 21).

Due to its notable religious shrines and its lanes defining established procession routes, Asan is also an important centre in Kathmandu's cultural geography. The large free-standing temple to Annapūrṇā that dominates its central hub is one of the most profusely patronized in town; this Tantric goddess receives offerings and gestures of respect from many in the multitudes who pass daily. Nearby is a popular Gaṇeśa temple and a street-level 'fish shrine' celebrated in local folk religion. Tachē Bāhāḥ, one of the 'eighteen Principal Bāhāḥs' of Kathmandu, is well known to the city's Buddhist community. And in adjacent Kel Twāḥ is the most important Buddhist monument in Kathmandu, the two-roof temple of Avalokiteśvara in Jana Bāhāḥ that is visited by thousands daily.

Because of such landmarks, Asan's crossroads is a major ceremonial centre. All important festival processions in Kathmandu pass through Asan as do political demonstrations. (For the latter, shopkeepers often close their shutters, sometimes in support, at other times in fear of crowd chaos and looting.) At times, Asan's central hub is transformed into a primary stage for festival performances and this 'natural theatricality' built into Newar life is expressed literally: like most major neighbourhoods, Asan has its own large raised permanent stage, the *dabū*. Until recently, when not used for masked dances or

musical performances, Asan's *dabū* was the money-changers' site. Here then is a simulacrum for Newar 'high civilization': vibrant commerce directly tied to cultural performance, with the symbiotic relationship literally built into the living urban infrastructure.

Many Asan *sāhujis* have other careers besides tending their businesses. There are writers, poets, politicians, and cultural activists living in Asan who are leading figures in Nepal's modern life. Kathmandu's first free printing press began publishing down an old Asan alley and today there are many individuals active in local periodicals, magazines, and journals, including Newari newspapers.

The residential environments of Kathmandu vary tremendously. The urban space is broken up irregularly into a maze of major market lanes, narrow passageways, and courtyards. In some places, neighbours are all relatives of the same caste; in other areas, they are all strangers, some from different ethnic groups. The courtyard can be a shared space for work, play, and cultural theatre; or else it can be a mere passageway. A family's ground space environment can be relatively clean and sunny, or an enclosed mire.<sup>5</sup> Buildings in Asan now rise to six and seven storeys to accommodate the rising population that has nowhere to build but upward.

Asan's buildings are an extraordinary montage of materials and styles, ranging from the indigenous design using brick façade, clay roofing tiles, with wooden beams and trim, to the European neo-classical style of the Rana era and the modern functional forms that use cement and corrugated iron. Compared to the other largest traditional Newar towns (such as Bhaktapur or even other parts of Kathmandu)—where kitchen gardens and trees are seen behind the houses—Asan's space has been very extensively built upon. Fewer buildings in the traditional style endure and Kathmandu's houses push higher than elsewhere.

There are ninety-six free-standing shrines in Asan, including seven Buddhist *vihāras* (monasteries) and roughly 280 images used for public devotions (Lewis 1984: 116–20). The goddess Annapūrṇā 'owns' two houses; these and over ten other buildings serve as evening rest-houses for pilgrims and the homeless.

Of all the Valley cities, Kathmandu has been the most exposed to outside cultures and peoples. The former walled boundaries have been long lost as the in-migrant population has occupied buildings erected on former paddy-fields (T. R. Joshi 1974: 245). (Lalitpur and greater Kathmandu are now one continuous urban settlement.) The people of Asan have altered their residences to adapt to these changing circumstances: residents have opened a myriad of small hotels and restaurants in the market area to provide services for the migrant labourers, pilgrims, tourists, and refugees who have come to the nation's capital.

Finally, Kathmandu's status as a satellite linked to international commerce networks is readily apparent in the large sample of global mass-market merchandise in Asan shops: personal amenities (pharmaceuticals, sweets, alcohol, illicit drugs), media technologies (computer, video, photocopying, and photographic), and publications (including English-language newspapers, magazines, and books). Thousands of new television aerials and satellite dishes pierce the Asan sky, filling the morning and evening living spaces with a mind-boggling pot-pourri of Nepali news and global programming. Of all the complex communities that exist across the Newar landscape, there are few places in the Valley today that can rival Asan's pluralism, its juxtaposition of ancient and modern cultures, its spectrum of personalities and possibilities.

## 1.2. Demographic portrait

It is useful to summarize the results of a demographic survey of shops, residences, and street-sellers in Asan that was done in 1981 and updated in 1987.<sup>6</sup> First, there were 967 legally designated units, with the estimated Asan residential population (as defined in the Fig. 2.1 area, above) as roughly 4,400 individuals. The ethnic group breakdown on the household survey is shown in Table 2.1.

Asan's population has increased steadily since 1951. With most families having no other land elsewhere to expand to, the average living space per person has decreased due to inheritance divisions, and this despite houses having been rebuilt ever higher. Some brothers have divided their houses from the ground level upward, but many families have reached the minimum feasible width; increasingly, brothers now divide the father's house by floor levels. Only the richest few families who own land outside the old town walls have had the luxury of leaving Asan for more spacious quarters.<sup>7</sup>

*Shopkeepers* Shops are located on the ground floor (and the occasional second storey) of houses that line all the major roads of Asan. In the past, it was common practice for the family living above to have its business located below. But this pattern has changed somewhat in recent years: many families have divided street-level space to keep only part for the family business while renting

TABLE 2.1. *The ethnic identity of Asan residents*  
(in percentages)

Newars tracing ancestry to Kathmandu	95
Newars tracing ancestry to Bhaktapur	1.2
Parbatiyās	3.0
Ethnic Tibetans, Buddhist	0.6
Ethnic Tibetans, Muslim	0.2
(N = 4,400)	100

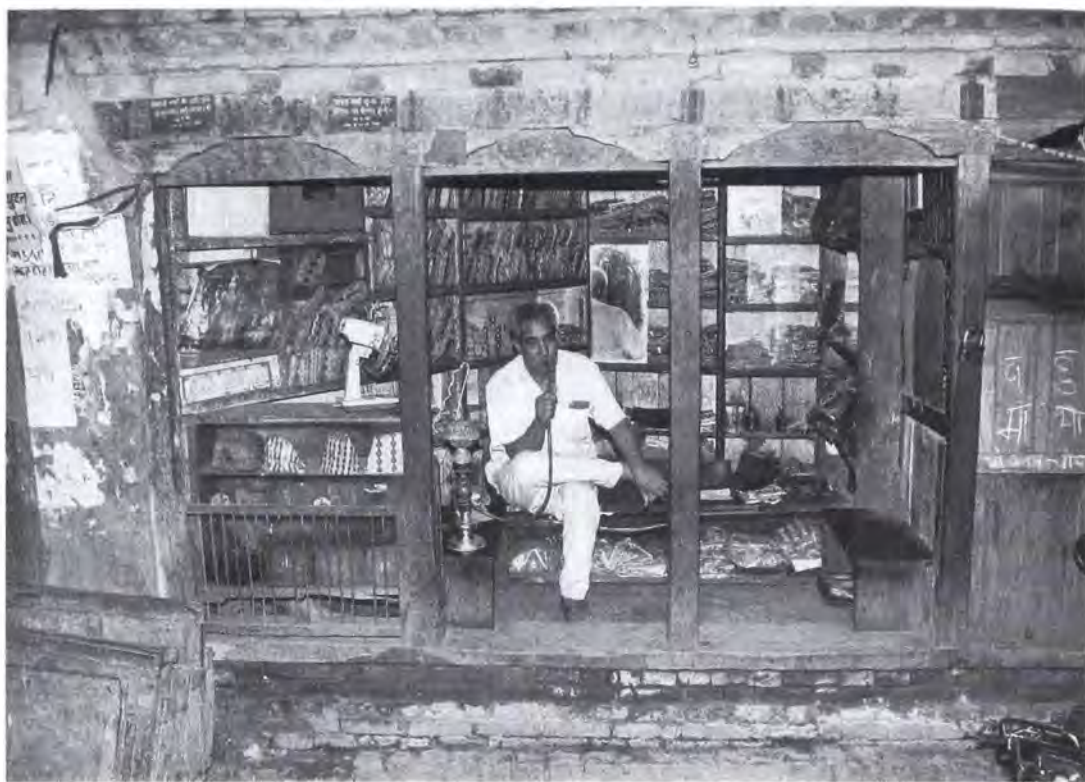


PLATE 2. An Urāy shopkeeper enjoying his hookah. (T. T. Lewis)

a subdivision (or two) to others. This has occurred for three main reasons: rising land and rental values due to the sustained profitability of the market; families moving the business elsewhere; or sons leaving market trade for other pursuits.<sup>8</sup> The practice of subdividing and renting out all available shop space has grown in recent years so that almost every ground-floor area on all Asan's main lanes is now someone's shop.

Despite the subdivisions, the ethnic breakdown of shopkeepers has remained fairly constant in the 1980s. (Most new subdivisions between 1982 and 1987 were actually leased to relatives.) In Asan, then, outsiders have gained a limited

TABLE 2.2. *The ethnic identity of Asan shopkeepers, 1980/1987*  
(in percentages)

Newars tracing ancestry to Kathmandu	85
Tibetans <sup>a</sup> (Buddhists—4.3%; Muslims—2.7%)	7
Parbatiyās	3.5
Indians	2.5
Newars tracing recent ancestry to Bhaktapur	2.0
(N = 402)	100

<sup>a</sup> The success of the Tibetans can be explained in part by the fact that as refugees they have little else but trade to support themselves; for some, their success in Asan is also related to their contacts with former Tibetan traders among the Newars.

business foothold more readily than a residential one. This should not be surprising: given that population increases in town have left most Asan families with insufficient residential space for themselves, there is little chance for outsiders to buy in.

In 1987 several additional changes were evident in the market-place compared to 1982: electricity was on almost always (in 1982 it was off every day); there were police stationed (in little blue kiosks) in every neighbourhood (due to a rising crime rate); Asan's tourist curio shops were in decline (1982: 14; 1987: 2); a great expansion in audio-cassette-sellers and video rental stores, and of individuals with video filming businesses; notable increases in Chinese goods, bottled cooking gas appliances, stainless steel, fish vendors. Especially striking was the great surge in women regularly working as shopkeepers (1982: 3; 1987: 15).

*Street-sellers* The movement of people and merchandise through the market-place is a continuing spectacle as street-sellers and shoppers add to the ethnic diversity of the bazaar. Most street-sellers do not have their homes in Asan, but spend the daylight and early evening hours on the public thoroughfares. Space on these streets is precious and sellers must struggle with competitors and police to maintain it. Although there is some seasonal and day-long variation, the survey data in Table 2.3 summarize a regular autumn weekday, giving an indication of the ethnic diversity of the market streets. Over the course of one year (1980–1), we counted over two hundred different foods and dozens of goods sold by itinerant sellers.

### Summary portrait: Asan Twāḥ, a modern Newar community

As a residential neighbourhood, Asan has remained almost totally Newar, and internally its caste communities remain remarkably separate. In the daytime outsiders come to sell and buy, adding to the ethnic pluralism: some utilize

TABLE 2.3. *The ethnic identity of street-sellers, central Asan, 28 October 1980 (in percentages)*

Newars		
Kathmandu Maharjans	10.0	} 46.5
Thimi Maharjans	17.0	
Kathmandu Nāpit	19.5	
Parbatiyā		30.8
Tamangs		18.0
Indians		4.7
(N = 92)		100

*Note:* On this same day, there were 25 Indian *sādhus*, 9 Theravāda monks, and 7 lamas who passed through the market. Tamangs serve mostly as porters. We also counted 157 tourists. In 1987 the only change in this data would be a substantial increase (300%?) in Indian street-sellers.

rented shop space, many more use the public streets to hawk foodstuffs and miscellaneous goods, while still others sell their labour to provide all sorts of transport. Also living off the money changing hands in Asan are the destitute, the occasional wandering holy men, and a few pickpockets.

Asan Twāḥ is a case study of a modern Newar market and of competing merchant communities divided on religious lines. Class differences further complicate Asan's society: with the contrasts introduced by differential levels of literacy, wealth, and widespread (if fragmentary) outside cultural influences (predominantly Western, increasingly Japanese), life-styles in the bazaar span a vast spectrum of possibilities.<sup>9</sup>

This backdrop of the bazaar's utter diversity—spanning centuries of evolutionary stages, multi-ethnic and multi-caste, culturally multidimensional (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam)—must not be lost sight of: there are computer programmers living alongside Tantric meditators, wealthy gold merchants who send their sons to America mixing in the streets with illiterate hill farmers who once in a lifetime come to visit the fabled capital; there are homeless destitutes, rickshaw pullers, Hindu holy men, international jet-setters, the occasional anthropologist. Some old women speak little Nepali and have seen little of the world outside their town; a few middle-aged men (and women) have been around the world and resided in New York, Moscow, Tokyo. Communal feelings run strong and few have forgotten the conquered status of the Newars.<sup>10</sup> Although half the Kathmandu Valley today is non-Newar, most residents still tend to have few close non-Newar friends. There are very few violent crimes, but this may change as there are increasing numbers of heroin addicts in the capital, and a few are Asan sons.

In the waking hours, Asan's main pursuit is business. But amidst the myriad transactions, and somewhat hidden from view, Asan is also a residential neighbourhood sustained by a rich cultural and religious life-style.<sup>11</sup> The high Buddhist castes (Vajrācārya, Śākya, and Urāy) constitute roughly 50 per cent of local residents, compared to their combined 18 per cent reported for all Kathmandu (Greenwold 1974*a*). We now turn to the numerically dominant Buddhist group in Asan, the Urāy.

## 2. *The Urāy*

It should not seem surprising that merchants occupy a prominent position among Newar Buddhists, given their importance in the 2,500-year history of Indo-Tibetan and pan-Asian Buddhism. For many centuries, Newar mercantile families have occupied an influential niche among élites contesting for dominance in the Kathmandu polity (M. C. Regmi 1976*a*; Rose and Fisher 1970). This remains true in modern Shah-era Nepal, although today they must vie for influence with the greatest Indian trading families, the Marwaris<sup>12</sup> and

the most successful traders from across the Himalayan regions, particularly Manangis, Thakalis, Sherpas, and Tibetans (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975).

The Urāy are high-caste Buddhist merchants found almost exclusively in Kathmandu.<sup>13</sup> Modern Urāy explain their name as a derivative of *upāsaka*, a Sanskrit term meaning 'devout layman',<sup>14</sup> and speak of their group's distinctly Buddhist self-identity in other areas: they eschew the 'Five Professions' prohibited in the early Buddhist texts (trade in weapons, animals, meat, wine, or poison) and uphold the ethos of non-violence in personal relations and ritual preferences.<sup>15</sup> In addition to not eating beef and pork, Urāy also abstain from chicken eggs and meat, again citing a Buddhist textual source (Lewis 1984: 204). Pan-Newar 'caste logic' generally recognizes 'Urāy' as *vaiśyas* who rank as a high Buddhist caste just below the Śākya.

The names of some Urāy sub-groups suggest origins as artisan and mercantile specialists, as most refer to craftsman identity: Sthāpit (colloquially 'Sīkaḥmi') carpenters, Kaṃsakār ('Kasāḥ') metal-workers, Tāmraḥ ('Tamoḥ' or 'Tamaḥ') bell-metal-workers,<sup>16</sup> Śilpakār ('Lōḥkaḥmi' or 'Lwahākaḥmi') stone masons, Sikrīkār ('Āwā') tilers, Rājkarṇikār ('Marikaḥmi') confectioners, and Sindūrakār powder-sellers. Only the Baniyā ('Merchants') and Tulādhar ('Scale-Holders') lack names suggestive of specific craftsman origins. (These names of the Urāy sub-groups, along with their traditional tasks and Kathmandu neighbourhoods, are indicated in Table 2.4.)

Although Urāy origins as a caste cannot be discerned from known historical records, it is clear that group history is multi-stranded. The multiplicity of

TABLE 2.4. *Important aspects of Urāy sub-groups*

Honorific name	Non-honorific name	<i>Twāḥ</i>	Samyak task
Tulādhar	(Urāy)	Asan Naradevī Jhwā Bāhāḥ	distributing leaf plates cooking <i>pūjā</i> rice none
Kaṃsakār	Kasāḥ	Kel Twāḥ	preparing and serving condiments
Tāmraḥ	Tamoḥ	Maru Twāḥ Mahā Bauddha	playing <i>pāitāḥ bājā</i> none
Baniyā	Banyā	Itum Bāhāḥ Jhocē	making <i>sākhaḥi</i>
Rājkarṇikār	Marikaḥmi	Maru Twāḥ	none
Sthāpit	Sikaḥmi	Thāy Maru Yetkhā Bāhāḥ	construction of viewing stand (discontinued)
Śilpakār/Śilākār	Lwahākaḥmi	Mahā Bauddha Yangāl	none
Sikrīkār (now: Tulādhar)	Āwā	Te Bāhāḥ	clay pot makers, clay saucer handlers (discontinued)
Sindūrakār	(Urāy)	Yetkhā Bāhāḥ	none

Note: Total Urāy population: 1,100 households (Greenwold 1974a: 103).



many separate clan deities (*digu dyaḥ*) and the array of family Tantric deities (*āgā dyaḥ*) support this view. Each Urāy family theoretically has both allegiances, but this network of ties between households and such shrines now represents only one intra-caste organizing facet overlaid with many others (as will be seen below).<sup>17</sup>

Urāy origins and avenues of assimilation were varied. Some Urāy lineages probably date back to Śākya or Vajrācārya males who did not undergo Buddhist initiations (and so fell one status level) and there were doubtless also children of mixed marriages between Śākya or Vajrācārya men and women of lower-caste groups (Greenwold 1974a: 110). Another likely avenue of assimilation was by men who were 'diaspora traders' (Curtin 1984) in India and Tibet (D. B. Bista 1978). The greatest of these trading families maintained a network of business offices across the Indo-Tibetan region and second marriages between such Urāy men and Indian or Tibetan women produced offspring who then, in rare cases, married into already existing Kathmandu lineages.<sup>18</sup> There are still scattered examples of this practice today.

All nine Urāy groups today constitute a single marriage circle defined by participation in certain ritual and commensal activities. (These are discussed below.) Within this circle, however, there is a sense of internal stratification among Urāy: today lineages with surnames Tulādhar, Baniyā, Kaṃsakār, and Tāmraḥ are the most highly regarded in Kathmandu. The special prestige of Tulādhar lineages is shown by the growing practice of other Urāy sub-groups now abandoning their older designations and giving 'Tulādhar' as their family surname. In recent decades, this tendency has increased the 'original' Tulādhar groups' sensitivity to their boundaries: Asan and Naradevī Tulādhar elders judge the legitimacy of others' claims to use their name by reckoning a family's membership in their oldest institutions, i.e. the Samyak Guthi and the Gūlā Bājā. (For a description of these, see below.)

Tulādhar ('Scale-Holder') as a sub-caste name may date back to the fifteenth-century rule of Jaya Sthiti Malla (Lévi 1905: ii. 232–6; Petech 1984) and is mentioned by the nineteenth-century writers (Wright 1877). The use of this name certainly indicates business origins, as sale by weight has been the norm for centuries. Some modern Tulādhar have suggested that there were two core Tulādhar groups: families with trading ties to Tibet and those still known by the name 'Baniyā'.

As shown in Fig. 2.2, there are three centres of Tulādhar settlement in Kathmandu city: Asan Twāḥ, Naradevī Twāḥ (Nw. 'Neta'), and Jhwā Bāhāḥ. The Tulādhar men of Asan, who contest their being rated inferior in status to any Urāy, are the largest and most diverse of the Urāy groups. Their elders reckon their boundaries carefully, despite pressure from 'reformers', and exclude Urāy from Jhwā Bāhāḥ from their number. The latter, who live around a major monastery north of Asan, are generally regarded as inferiors by the other

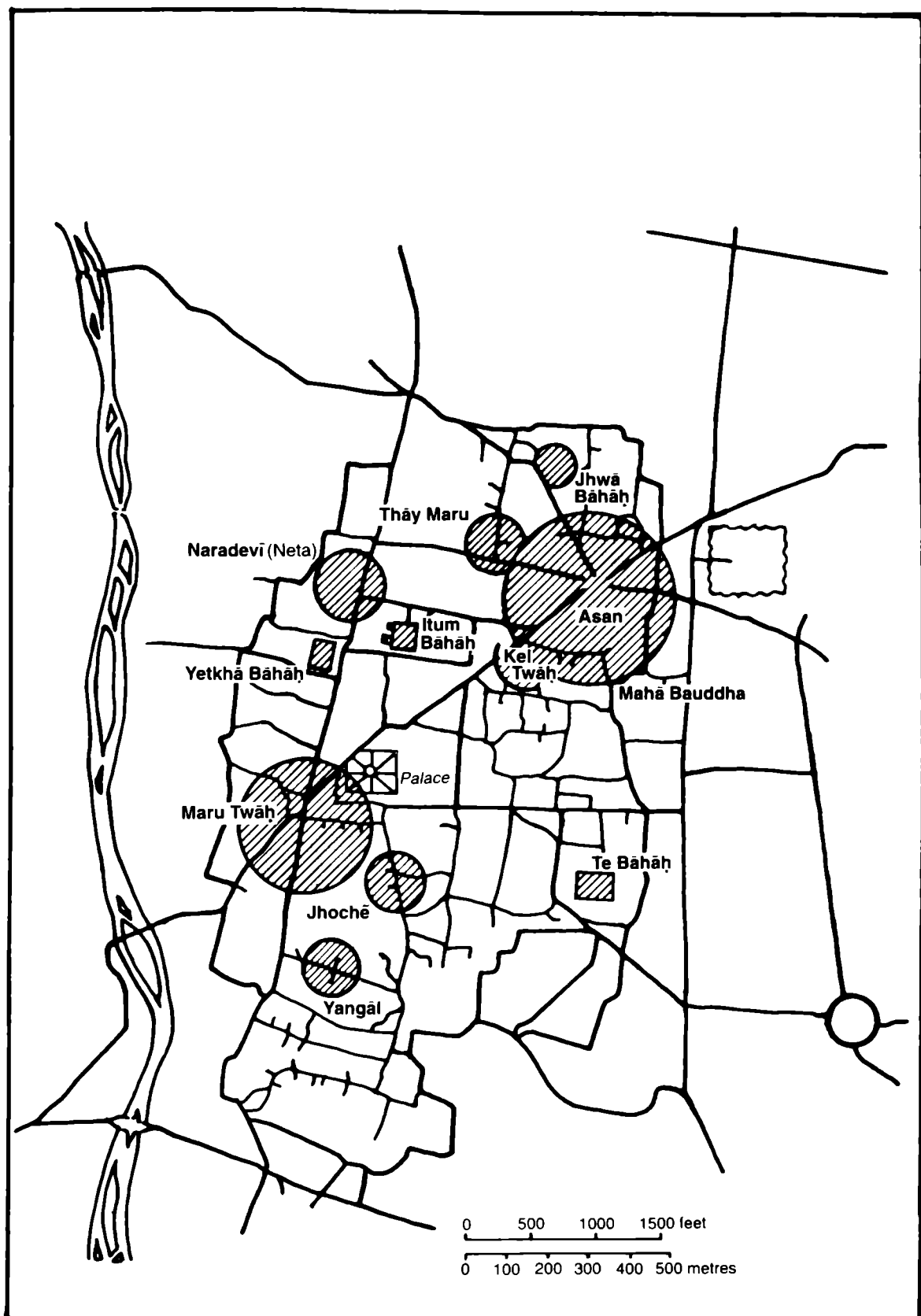


FIG. 2.2. The traditional centres of Urāy settlement in Kathmandu

two 'pure Tulādhār' groups. No one was sure of the reason, but there were suggestions that their small lineage included a half-Tibetan several generations back. All Jhwā Bāhāh Tulādhārs share a common *āgā dyah*.

The Naradevī Tulādhārs, who are much fewer in number than the Asan Tulādhārs and live in the north-west region of the old city, assert that their rank is slightly higher than the Asan group. Their lineages are strictly exogamous, claim descent from a common ancestor named Pati Sāhu, and worship the same *digu dyah* but at least eight different *āgā dyahs*. There is considerable status rivalry between the Asan and Naradevī communities, despite—or rather precisely because of—the fact of extensive affinal ties between them. Indeed, much of the repertoire of Buddhist and Hindu cultural performances can be seen as orchestrated statements articulating these inter- and intra-caste 'patri-boundaries'.

Today, Tulādhārs occupy quite a spectrum of influential positions in modern Nepal. Some of the largest import–export and construction companies are Urāy enterprises. This includes major operatives in the 'second economies'. Families that have long benefited from wealth and access to education have members who now occupy the highest echelons of power in government, international development service, and education. One could even chart an international network of Urāy sons and daughters living across the world.

## 2.1. Kinship

The Urāy kinship system conforms to pan-Newar patterns described so comprehensively by Toffin (1975a; 1984): patrilineal descent, a preference for patrilocal joint extended family residence, emphasis on the mother's brother (*pāju*) in relations with mother's kin, with status and power formally resting in the eldest males of the lineage. Women receive dowries while men (along with unmarried women over 35) divide the father's estate equally. The *phuki* is an important family unit, designating members united by patrilineage who perform special rituals (e.g. to clan deities and during Mohanī *pāyāh*) and together undergo pollution restrictions at times of birth or death.

For Urāy women, too, kinship relations conform to high-caste Indic norms. Women, like the men, must marry outside of their patrilineages that are traced back through at least seven generations.<sup>19</sup> An urban woman's ties to her natal home (*thaḥ chē*) sustain an important though secondary centre throughout her life. Married daughters' husbands (*jilājā*) also have a ceremonial role to play on certain ritual occasions.

Upper-caste Newar women such as the Tulādhārs live a much more secluded and circumscribed life compared to the Newar women in the Maharjan farming communities (B. Pradhan 1981). Urāy traditions observed in public places are almost completely male affairs, although women work behind the scenes in support and observe from balconies; they take a much more central

role in life-cycle rites and other ritual observances in both their husband's and natal households.

Divorce and widow remarriage have long been accepted, but both are very rare in Asan. The provision for a woman's securing divorce by leaving betel nuts on her pillow (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 37) has not been customary among Urāy within anyone's recollection *except* for the rare circumstance of a very young woman who is widowed.

We have already noted that the Urāy marriage circle is defined by the entire Urāy community of Kathmandu, constituting nine named patrilineal groups: Tulādhars, Kaṃsakārs, Baniyā, Tāmrakārs, Sindūrakār, Rājkaṇṇikār,<sup>20</sup> Sthāpit, Śilpakār, and Sikrīkār. Ideally, a marriage is arranged between children of equal economic levels and there is a vague preference to find partners within the same Urāy sub-group.

In the Asan Tulādhār community very few first marriages (1980–2: 4%) were consummated outside the Urāy sub-groups. Polygamy is now rare and is usually due to a first wife's infertility. Second marriages for men outside the Urāy marriage circle are acceptable if the woman is of sufficiently high-caste status; such unions threaten the husband's status only if he eats ritually significant food from this household. A second marriage most often necessitates setting up a second separate urban household and few today can afford the great expense.

Fictive kin relations (Nw. *twāy*) between unrelated friends, a custom noted among other ethnic groups in Nepal (Messerschmidt 1982), is encountered only very rarely in the Urāy context.

The social life of the Urāy is ordered largely by *guthis*, socio-religious associations that unite individuals to perform certain tasks which often have a religious goal or motive at base. The present discussion is restricted to the distinctly Tulādhār/Asan Twāḥ manifestations of these pan-Newar institutions and will focus on the major *guthis* that Asan Tulādhars participate in, with remarks about other Urāy groups added. The order follows the general importance and cross-caste inclusiveness of these important institutions.

## 2.2. Samyak Guthi

Samyak is the greatest Newar Buddhist festival, a three-day spectacle attended by the king, an occasion when all Newar Buddhist caste groups in Kathmandu take action and the entire field of Kathmandu Valley Buddhism (as seen from Kathmandu city) assembles. A multi-caste, city-wide *guthi* is responsible for orchestrating Kathmandu's Samyak observance once every twelve years (Sakya 1979).<sup>21</sup> For their part in Samyak, each Urāy group (like every major Buddhist caste) has a role to play specified by local tradition. Asan Tulādhars must sew leaf plates (*jyahnā lapte*) which are used for offerings presented to the Buddhas

and the Newar *saṃgha*. The duties of other Urāy are: Naradevī Tulādharas cook and ladle out rice; Kaṃsakārs serve accompanying foods (*ghāsā*); Tāmraḥkārs take out their *pāñṭāḥ bājā* for accompanying the Svayambhū palanquin entourage (see below); Sthāpits construct wooden viewing stands (see Plate 4); Sikrīkārs supply clay pots [but in 1980: discontinued]; Baniyās of Itum Bāhāḥ and Jochē serve milk and *sākhaṭi*, a brown sugar-spiced beverage.

Co-ordinated by an all-Kathmandu *guthi* created to supervise the task, for their part an Asan Tulādhar *guthi* was organized according to thirty-eight households. Each of these units, called a *kawaḥ*, is led by the eldest male, who is responsible for his group's participation. The eldest among the *kawaḥ* elders is the Tulādhar *twāḥ thakāli*. He is responsible for the group's performance, keeps the *guthi* records, and serves as the ritual leader for all of the preparatory rituals. In this work he is assisted by others next senior in line, although much of the actual work may be delegated to elders' sons and grandsons. Such organizational principles for Samyak are in place today for all the major Urāy sub-groups involved.

As for other Urāy, membership in the Samyak Guthi has come to be regarded as the ultimate criterion for confirming membership in a 'pure-Urāy' lineage. In 1979 the Tulādhar group elders in Asan realized the need for an accurate census and so compiled a definitive membership list. The fact that Jhwā Bāhāḥ Tulādharas are not formally involved in this festival or in Gūlā Bājā (below) is given today as the reason for rejecting them as 'pure Tulādhar'.

The Samyak Guthi is also the basis for selecting the Urāy boy who must participate in another cultural performance connected with the king: the Kumār Pyākhā, a procession and dance performed three times during the yearly Mohanī (Np. Dasāī) festival. Dancing as Kumār, the Indic deity of war and wealth, Urāy take part in the elaborate ceremonies in which the King of Nepal makes offerings to his lineage's guardian goddess Taleju at her Hanumān Dhoka temple.<sup>22</sup> To perform this Tantric dance, the boy must receive special training from a Vajrācārya master and observe dietary restrictions. (Rituals at the end, too, suggest his possession by this deity.) For these performances, this Urāy group must assemble a *pāñca tāl bājā*, a musical group in which members sing while being accompanied by long horns (*pāñṭāḥ*), cymbals (*tāḥ*), and a three-sided drum (*khodā*). (This *bājā* accompanies only the most important Newar deities.) Every five years, the Asan Tulādhar and the Kel Twāḥ Kaṃsakār communities assemble a list of eligible boys between the ages of 10 and 14 and choose one by lottery who must dance at five festivals.

The Samyak Guthi's role in organizing the Urāy community corresponds to the *deślā guthi* ('*guthi* of the locality') that is found among other Newar communities (see below, Ch. 8, Section 5), though it is not called this in Asan. In other neighbourhoods and for other castes in Kathmandu—Vajrācāryas (De Ācārya Guthi), Kaṃsakārs, Citrakārs, Mānandharas—this type of *guthi* has been able to work for the betterment of the local caste.<sup>23</sup> In the Naradevī Tulādhar community, for example, young activists gained the approval of the caste elders



PLATE 3. Accompanied by the *pāñca tāl bājā*, an Asan Tulādhār youth dances as the god Kumār. (T. T. Lewis)

to set up a six-*kawaḥ* structure to organize a yearly feast, make modern investments with *guthi* funds, and pursue programmes of community uplift for their poorer members. Perhaps the most active Urāy community group is that of the Kel Twāḥ Kaṃsakārs, who maintain an accurate, regularly updated census of members and at the yearly *digu dyaḥ pūjā* feast note the deaths, births, and special achievements in the community.

It is perhaps because Asan Tulādhars are far more numerous than the Kel Twāḥ Kaṃsakārs that such *twāḥ guthi*-based modernizations have not taken place. Except for the yearly Kumār performance and during the Samyak festival itself, the Samyak Guthi as a whole is not active in Asan. Another *kawaḥ* schema is utilized to organize a more active and equally important Urāy social unit, the *Gūlā bājā*.

### 2.3. *Gūlā bājā*

Asan Tulādhars, like many Urāy sub-groups,<sup>24</sup> are permanently organized to marshal their devotional energies for caste processions in which members play drums and cymbals with musical accompaniment (M. R. Allen, forthcoming). There are two periods each year for group-coordinated Buddhist musical

performances: (1) the month-long morning visitation of Svayambhū and other Buddhist centres during Gūlā (Lewis 1993*d*); and (2) the month of playing *dhāḥ* drums before the Annapūrṇā temple each night during the month of Kārtik.

For organizing the *bājā*, the Asan Tulādhār community was divided long ago into twelve groups (*kawaḥ*), each headed by a seniormost leader called a *pāḥlāḥmha* (or *pāhlā*). Every year the responsibility for organizing and leading the *bājā* falls upon a different *pāḥlāḥmha* and his *kawaḥ* according to a fixed cycle of rotation.

When a new *kawaḥ*'s turn arrives each year at the end of Kārtik, its own eldest member becomes the *pāḥlāḥmha* and he will organize the heads of each household in his cell to do all that is necessary for the coming year's performances. In order of their occurrence, the main activities are:<sup>25</sup> teaching sessions for the young men on drum-playing and cymbal rhythm (before the month of playing begins); preliminary *pūjās* to Nāsaḥ Dyaḥ (Kasa 1963); providing the instruments and a plate of offerings for the daily morning trek to Svayambhū; organizing the Asan Tulādhār community-wide *nislāḥ* feast at the end of Gūlā; and the day-long visitation to the Buddhist deities (*bahi dyaḥ*) displayed all over the city (also near the month's end). The *bājā* system in Asan and Naradevī is very highly defined by traditional attendance-taking procedures and many *kawaḥs* keep ledgers to note fines for absences as well as to record required contributions.

Prestige and respect in the Urāy community are garnered by those displaying managerial skill. Serving well as the *pāḥlāḥmha* is one domain in which this expertise can be demonstrated. Indeed, the *pāḥlāḥmha* bears the full burden of arranging for all of the logistical needs in the *bājā*'s traditional performances for his year. This is very important 'community work', as the entire caste's devotional presentation for all Kathmandu to witness is in the hands of the designated *pāḥlāḥmha*. To maintain the status of his own family and that of all Asan Tulādhārs, the acting *pāḥlāḥmha* will usually take care to fulfil this role conscientiously. He knows that his peers will not flag in criticizing his performance if he falls short.

The economic status and generosity of a *pāḥlāḥmha* are also under public scrutiny when his turn comes since he (and other *kawaḥ* notables) must bear the burden of all costs in excess of the group's common fund. This dimension of the Gūlā *bājā* has led to recent difficulties when the less affluent have been unable to perform all the customary activities or contribute their own cash to cover the inevitable cost overruns. Moreover, some *kawaḥs* have declined in size while others have expanded, a fact that has meant that all Tulādhārs in Asan do not bear an equal share in supporting the *bājā*. (Both Naradevī and Asan Urāy have rejected efforts by the now smaller *kawaḥs* to reapportion the membership boundaries.) Because of such problems, recent *pāḥlāḥmhas* have organized a modern bank investment fund that can be added to by member

donations and hence generate interest income that may soon be sufficient to eliminate this economic hardship.

Each year, the *pāḥlāḥmha* system of the *Gūlā bājā* defines the duties and monetary costs of an institution that is central to the Tulādhar's Buddhist devotionalism. Under this system, however, note how each urban household's maximum required participation in the *bājā* is really compartmentalized to being, at most, daily for one month every twelve years. (With the extended family as the unit of participation, it is possible for an individual to avoid involvement altogether if he is so inclined.)

While it is correct to say that the *Gūlā bājā* draws all Asan Tulādhar into a common, caste-defined set of devotional activities, this must be qualified by noting that on only one occasion each year, the *niślāḥ* feast during *Gūlā*, does the entire *bājā* population really assemble. Otherwise, the greatest turn-out on the full moon of *Gūlā* is only a few hundred and the usual *bājā* comprises only twenty or so men each day who gather to play devotional music together. Thus, the *Gūlā bājā* plays a central role in organizing male Tulādhar society, but only very rarely does it succeed in orchestrating unified large-scale participation. Like many Newar traditions today, the Asan *Gūlā bājā* endures for two reasons: first, because its organization still effectively disperses responsibility for performing the necessary tasks; and secondly, there is still a core of Tulādhar—including many young men—who enjoy heartily rapping out drumbeats, clanging cymbals, and singing in praise of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other deities.

Finally, the role of the *bājā* in maintaining intra-Urāy hierarchy must be underlined. In Asan through the 1980s, young reformers have lobbied to have the Jhwā Bahāḥ men included in their *Gūlā bājā*, both to share in the economic/manpower burdens and since, as one middle-aged *sāhuji* said at a group meeting, 'Aren't they Buddhists, too, and therefore as followers of Buddha Dharma equal with us?' As of 1987, the consensus remained that the purity of Asan's patrilineages could not be compromised, despite considerable sympathy for these sentiments.

## 2.4. Digu Khyah Samiti

Yearly worship of the *digu dyah* (Np.: *kuldevatā*; K. B. Bista 1972) is one of the principal religious activities of Urāy patrilineal descent groups (*phuki*). These shrines, usually no more than specially demarcated stones, are characteristically located outside of the old city boundaries.

Oral accounts of *digu dyah* history assert Urāy family origins outside Kathmandu city and recall the effects of Rana rule. Several Tulādhar elders recount their family origins in stories set in Visal Nagar,<sup>26</sup> a town their forefathers left (taking their *digu dyah* with them) for Kathmandu after a terrible fire. The second bit of more recent historical information is common know-



ledge among most Urāy: just before the turn of the last century, the shrines of many different Urāy lineage *digu dyaḥs* were scattered at the edge of the Tundikhel, an open field that lies to the east of the town. Rana Prime Minister Bir Shamsher, who ruled from 1885 to 1901, seized these lands for new building projects and forced the Urāy to move their shrines to Pakanajol, an area north of the town boundaries. From that time, affected *phukis* performed their yearly *pūjās* at the shrines there. Over the years, however, squatters settled on this land, a trend which has been widespread around Kathmandu city since 1960.

This encroachment was tolerated until 1975, when several squatters resisted as Tulādhars families tried to gain access to their shrines. This spurred Asan leaders to take legal action through the courts, one of the few Urāy attempts of this kind. The protracted struggle culminated in a verdict that cut away most of the land given by Bir Shamsher, but allowed Tulādhars to secure a remaining small lot from further encroachment. To fight the case, Asan Tulādhars families joined with Jhwā Bāhāḥ families who also had their *digu dyaḥ* shrines moved there. After the decision, both groups followed the successful example of the Naradevī Tulādhars (cited above) and formed the Digu Khyaḥ Samiti ('Lineage [deity] Field Committee'). Thus, in this new and modern institution, the Jhwā Bāhāḥ Tulādhars have attained the inclusion which has been denied them, so far, in older ones.

Using modern managerial methods, the Samiti organizers—led by some of the most respected Asan businessmen—collected large and small contributions donated by every one of the 175 families concerned. The leaders divided these funds, totalling over 300,000 rupees, into a system of capital investment shares, with most of the cash used for building a revenue-generating office building on the collective land. By 1987 these had become a lucrative source of income for the group and beyond the cost of yearly *pūjās* and feasting, the Samiti treasurer distributed additional profit to each shareholder. Thus, the Tulādhars have created a new institution using modern fund-raising techniques to meet a traditional religious purpose. Although there are five Asan Tulādhars *phukis* that have their *digu dyaḥs* elsewhere (and did not join this group), the very successful Digu Khyaḥ Samiti has provided a striking example of the fruits of pan-Urāy solidarity.

## 2.5. Cremation *guthis*

Emblematic of Newar civilization being one of the most ritually orientated in the world (and especially among the rich who can afford to sponsor expensive performances), Urāy traditions are intricately organized around death. At this time of family crisis, when *karma* operates and the rebirth destiny of the deceased is at stake, these Urāy *guthis* provide group ritual insurance. This is an important concern, since proper rituals maintain high-class dignity while also

meeting the ethical imperative of performing all rites that lessen the danger of the departed one becoming a *preta* ('hungry ghost').

Urāy families have two alternatives for managing death and cremation. One is to 'go it alone' as an extended family and enter into a relationship with a Gwā family who will cremate the corpse for a fee. If the family remains independent in this way, it must also rely on close kin and friends to assist in making arrangements for the funeral procession. This can be risky as it assumes a measure of support that for various reasons may not be forthcoming when death strikes. (In 1981 roughly 20% of all Asan Tulādhār households had chosen this option.)

The other alternative is to be a member of an Urāy *guthi* in which all of the members (*guthiyārs*) share in the task of making arrangements and, in the most inclusive *guthi*, themselves cremating a dead member's body. Having *guthi* ties does entail a considerable yearly work burden, but every member can rest assured that when the occasion arises in one's own household, all funeral arrangements will be done properly.

Both types of Newar cremation *guthi* are found in Asan: the *sī guthi* and the *sanāḥ guthi*. In the *sī guthi* the *guthiyārs* arrange for all of the preparations of the cremation procession and then they fully cremate the body unassisted by Gwās. (This task can last up to ten hours.) Thus, the *sī guthiyārs* negotiate and pay for all of the costs of the cremation. Most funeral *guthis* in Urāy society also have a Vajrācārya household in its membership; it must send a *guruju* to perform the last rites for the members in return for either 'coverage' by the *guthi* and/or a stipend.

The role of cremation *guthi pāḥlāḥmha* rotates yearly on the basis of the separate household, and each year a special multi-day cycle of ritual and feasting marks the passing on of the duties that include taking possession of the roll book, the ceremonial brocade cloth that covers the corpse as it is carried to the cremation grounds, and other ritual items. Tulādhār *guthis* make provision for son-less widows to be members in the cremation *guthis*. They can pay a yearly fee and help at the yearly winter feast in return for 'coverage' by the *guthi*.

For the *sanāḥ guthi* (also called *bicāḥ guthi*), the *guthiyārs* also arrange for and join the procession to the burning grounds, but once the pyre is lit, their obligations for this day are over. Gwās then take care of the burning, dealing directly with a *guthi* representative. Although cremations are their speciality, Gwās are generally thought to be careless, even irresponsible, in carrying through the task of burning the corpse. (Some families will make special 'tips' to try to insure that the Gwās do everything properly.) Finally, the *sanāḥ guthiyārs* must also pay an early morning condolence (*bicāḥ*) visit to the bereaved family on the day after the cremation.

In Asan (1982) there are three *sī guthis* and two *sanāḥ guthis*. The irrelevance of 'pure-Asan Tulādhār' membership in these groups is also shown by the fact

that Asan Tulādhars have readily opened their *guthis* to the Jhwā Bāhāḥ Tulādhars. In the Urāy context, informants insisted that there is no special prestige associated with cremation *guthi* membership, nor is there any social stigma for those who are not in a *guthi*.<sup>27</sup> Only if the rites are not carried out in a style that is considered proper for the caste or the deceased will there be social repercussions.

The Asan cremation *guthis* have tended to be very durable institutions. One reason for this is the efforts Tulādhars have made to provide for the rising economic costs. The gold and other valuable donations made by bereaved families on behalf of the deceased are now usually removed after the last rites and sold, with the proceeds deposited into a bank account. The interest income from such accounts is used to supplement the *guthiyārs'* yearly contributions, pay for the group's yearly communal feasting, and offset the sum the *pāḥlāḥmha* must provide in case of a cash shortfall. Wealthy bereaved families now contribute considerable sums to the common fund during the mourning period. In the Urāy cremation *guthis*, the *pāḥlāḥmha* has full autonomy in handling the funds and may lend them out to another *guthiyār* for a year at interest. Even with these resources, being *pāḥlāḥmha* still entails considerable personal expense for the myriad incidentals.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.6. Other *guthis*

In my survey sample of the Asan Tulādhār community. I discovered twenty-eight different *guthis* existing in 1982. This most certainly represents a substantial decrease from only two generations past since almost every family in my sample mentioned cases of *guthis* now lost due to the lack of landed income, personal interest, or both.

Many *guthis* were started by ancestors to orchestrate the continuation of religious activities, such as *vratas* (Locke 1987; Lewis 1989a) and the worshipping of specific deities on designated days (*āgā dyah*, Bhīmsen, Tārā, etc.). Optional *guthi* membership rights usually get divided between brothers, like all other properties.

The popularity of such *guthis* in the Kathmandu Valley is explained by the security of the investment: Indic religious norms (Hindu and Buddhist) are very strict about not having anyone interfere with such tax-free endowments and prescribe grave future penalties for anyone, kings and ministers included, who would dare to seize properties dedicated to the worship of the deities (M. C. Regmi 1976a: 50). By setting aside land or properties whose proceeds are perpetually designated for religious observances, families put themselves in a position to retain reliable incomes that should not suffer due to state actions. As long as the costs of the *pūjā*, etc. are met, the head of the *guthi*, by rule, may keep the remainder. Given little evidence of official scrutiny, such *guthis* with their devotional origins represented fine investments indeed.

Many small Urāy *guthi* lands have been lost to tenants. Here the fragmentation of *pāhlāḥmha* responsibility compounded the weakening of tradition: with each *guthiyār* having only a limited stake in keeping the group land(s), only rarely did anyone in a threatened *guthi* marshal the time and money necessary to contest the case in Nepal's legal system. Asan Tulādhars at times debate the 'Buddhist passivity syndrome' which some feel is the great flaw in Urāy character in the face of modern challenges.

It is important to note that many voluntary *guthis* are multi-caste associations that *unite* Newars for religious efforts, in contrast to the *guthis* cited above that serve to maintain caste boundaries and group hierarchies. In Naradevī, for example, there is a *guthi* for worshipping Śvetakālī: it has Śākya, Maharjan, Śreṣṭha, and Brāhmaṇ members. An Asan Bhīmsen *guthi* has a similar membership. *Guthis* work and new ones are still formed: the most recent established in Asan (1989) shares television reception lines from a commonly owned satellite dish.

## 2.7. *Bhajans*: Devotional music societies

The oldest devotional music played by Newar Buddhists is that of the Gūlā, Dhāḥ, and Pañca Tāl *bājās*, group traditions emphasizing processional drumming, cymbal-playing, and singing as offerings to the deities. In the later Rana period, the *bhajan* style of Hindu devotional music was popularized by Indian devotees, but soon Urāy began to play the instruments (tabla, sitar, harmonium, violin) and adapt the genre by composing myriad songs to the Buddhist divinities. Local neighbourhood orchestras, also known by the term *bhajan*, now organize such singing every night. (Some of Nepal's finest musicians on the violin, sitar, and harmonium have come from the Urāy community.)

When the large *bhajan* convenes, good, enthusiastically rendered songs of devotional praise to the deities ring out. As the Asan *bhajan* has grown in popularity, the modern *bhakti* ('personal devotion to a divinity') dimension of Mahāyāna lay Buddhism has been underscored and restated. The words and ethos expressed in the Newar *bhajan* capture the modern character of Urāy Buddhist devotionality as no other cultural form today does. As one Tulādhar layman said to me: 'You can read the *sūtras* to find the Buddhist views of our tradition and you can study the mumbo-jumbo of the Vajrācāryas to understand our rituals. But if you want to discern the *rasa* ("taste") of our Buddhist Dharma today, you must listen to the *bhajan*.'

In Asan (1987), five *bhajans* meet regularly in public rest-houses. As with other organizations, the *bhajans* show a wide spectrum of variance as to their membership, nightly attendance, and musical preferences. By far the largest, the Asan Jñāna Mālā Bhajan has been most active in introducing modern practices into its framework. These include leadership by elected *bhajan* offi-

cers, an accounting system that publishes a yearly balance sheet, and printed songbooks. It is also an inter-caste group, including a few Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans, but still is dominated by the local Tulādhars musicians. In recent years, Tulādhars have turned to the *bhajan* to organize events such as special *pūjā* programmes and pilgrimage bus trips to India. The *bhajan thakāli* ('leader') has become one of Asan's civic leaders.

Finally, the growth of the *bhajan* indicates another area in which Indic culture has influenced modern Newar life. But despite using Hindi film melodies to buoy their Buddhist lyrics, the *bhajan* phenomenon exemplifies the perennial Newar adaptation of Indian culture: Urāy feel pride at taking the outward Indic form and translating it to create their own fine Buddhist songs, sung in Newari.

### 3. *Inter-Caste Relations: The Tulādhars Perspective*

In conforming to the norms and rules of a caste-organized society, the Urāy adhere to patterns of Buddhist social accommodation found throughout the centuries in India.<sup>29</sup> Social life in Asan is ordered by the principles of caste endogamy and commensality; the concern with pollution and purity is similar to that found throughout the Indian subcontinent (Harper 1964): cooked rice, drinking water, and the hookah can be accepted only from caste equals or superiors. The family home is similarly protected from outside pollution, with the kitchen hearth and the *pūjā* rooms (*pūjā kwathā*, *āgā*) the most-guarded ritual sancta where lower caste individuals are not allowed. The Urāy share largely congruent norms of caste perception with their high-caste Hindu neighbours in key areas: sources of pollution (menstruating women,<sup>30</sup> body products, physical contact with Untouchables), sources of purity (e.g. flowing water, cow products,<sup>31</sup> mantras), and a general sense of caste hierarchy.

#### 3.1. Intercaste character of the Asan market

We have noted already that Asan Twāḥ is dominated by two merchant castes, the Tulādhars and the Śreṣṭhas. In the neighbourhood, however, a full spectrum of high- and low-caste Newar groups is present. Table 2.5 arranges these groups living in Asan in the order reported by Greenwold (1974a) in his survey of Kathmandu city. (Most of my informants in Asan agreed with the status ranking we have followed here, with the Urāy and Śreṣṭhas claiming superiority over one another.)

The Urāy have extensive relationships with many of these other caste groups and although inter-caste bonds have weakened in recent years, they are still discernible throughout the fabric of Urāy social life. Following Table 2.5, the most prominent inter-caste relationships are outlined from the perspective of the Asan Tulādhars.

TABLE 2.5. Caste breakdown of Asan residents (N = 968)

Buddhist castes	%	Hindu castes	%
Vajrācārya (62)	6.4	Upādhyāya Brāhmaṇ (1)	0.1
Śākya (39)	4.0		
Urāy:		Śreṣṭhas	
Tulādhār (342)	35.4	Karmācārya (10)	1.0
Kaṃsakār (52)	1.4	Rājibhaṇḍārī (24)	2.5
Tāmrakār (16)	1.7	Pradhān (13)	1.3
Sthāpit (5)	0.7	'Sreṣṭha' (227)	23.5
	39.2		28.3
		Maharjan (56)	1.8
Citrakār (7)	0.7		
Mānandhar (16)	1.7		
Nakarmī (4)	0.4	Mālākār (7)	0.7
Khaḍgī (7)	0.7	Kāpālī (7)	0.7
		Rajaka (1)	0.1
Groups recently settled in Asan			
Tibetan Buddhists (6)	0.6	Kāyastha (10)	1.0
		Joṣī (13)	1.3
		Misc. Newars (12)	1.2
		Non-Newar Hindus (31)	3.5

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of legally designated ownership units; location indicates estimated religious preference on Hindu–Buddhist axis.

### Brāhmaṇs

In my survey questionnaires, most Urāy stated that Brāhmaṇs are the topmost group in their declension of local caste society. Although they utilize Vajrācāryas for their regular household rituals and recognize them as their chief *gurus*, Tulādhars also resort to Brāhmaṇs in several ritual domains. Many have taken part in the popular Hindu ritual called *satya nārāyaṇa vrata* (Lewis 1989a) and have gone at times to story-telling sessions put on locally by different Newar Brāhmaṇs. Some Urāy also take part in the *ihi pūjā* life-cycle rites that are conducted by Brāhmaṇ ritualists. (The rite itself is mandatory for Urāy girls, but may be conducted by either a Brāhmaṇ or Vajrācārya.) Finally, for the *burā jākwa* old-age life-cycle rite, Buddhist Newars call a Brāhmaṇ to receive *godān* ('the gift of a cow').

### Vajrācāryas

According to the rules of the town-wide Vajrācārya *guthi*, a layman should call only his designated family Vajrācārya priest for the regular round of yearly *pūjās* and individual life-cycle rituals (Lewis 1994b). Moreover, only this priest, who is most commonly called *guruju* by Buddhist laymen, may worship the family *āgā dyah*, an essential component of any major household ritual.

As a result of the great Urāy–Vajrācārya dispute (1923–53), the previous pattern of *jajmān* tenure which had allotted Vajrācārya families to Urāy households came to an end.<sup>32</sup> Urāy bitterness with former *guruju*s was such that they

chose *en masse* to discard the old network of ties in favour of the few Vajrācārya families who supported their position. Although the fight was finally settled decades ago, the old *jajmān-guruju* pattern was never restored.<sup>33</sup> As a result, descendants from Vajrācārya families of Tachē Bāhāḥ (Asan) and Kwāḥ Bāhāḥ (in the north of town), still perform most ritual services for them.

For most Urāy, contact with the Vajrācāryas is in the person of their family's traditional *guruju*. Only through special programmes of public story recitation, or more rarely, by a layman reading modern texts published by leading Vajrācārya pandits, does this circle of contact expand. Urāy sense of Vajrācāryas being a *saṃgha* ('monastic community') is a fast-fading awareness. In my sample, few Tulādhars could name any Vajrācārya besides their *guruju* and perhaps one famous story-teller. This was especially true among the women.

### *Śākyas*

Many Kathmandu Śākyas are goldsmiths and silver-workers and the Tulādhars interact with them in this capacity. Śākyas are active in Buddhist devotionism and are members of optional *guthis* with the Urāy. They do have one ceremonial role to play for the Urāy: one of them may be invited to accompany a groom's party when fetching the new bride. At this time he is treated with special respect as a guest in the bride's home: perhaps drawing on this group's respected role as members of the *saṃgha*, the Śākya man fastens a bracelet around the girl's ankle as part of her farewell ceremonies.<sup>34</sup> Another minor and optional connection is that some wealthy Urāy merchants hire a Śākya woman to make a sweet called *catāmari* that is used in special rituals.

### *Jośī*

The family astrologer is the second most important cultural specialist for the average Urāy household (after the *guruju*). Many knowledgeable specialists who practise this art are from a Newar Jośī lineage, a Śreṣṭha subdivision.<sup>35</sup> An astrologer is needed to draw up an individual's horoscope soon after birth; throughout a person's life, the Jośī may act as an interpreter of good/bad fortune with reference to stars, planets, and timing *vis-à-vis* this document. Most commonly, the astrologer determines the date for any birthday and the exact auspicious moment (*sāit*) for commencing the key action in life-cycle rites. The Jośī is also consulted on the suitability of marriage partners, regarding land and building purchases, and for assistance in solving rather mundane problems such as illness, lost articles, problem children, or legal disputes. Leading Kathmandu astrologers give over one hundred consultations each day.

Urāy relations with their astrologers are *ad hoc* and unregulated; one pays in rice and coin for any consultation. Though theoretically open to change, families in Asan rarely stray from their past associations. The family women in my

sample handled over 85 per cent of the Tulādhar conferrals and held significantly greater belief in this system compared to the men. We also noted no major difference between the way that Hindu Newars and Buddhist Newars relate to the astrological tradition: both go to the same Joṣī and have the same horoscope drawn up, as nearly everyone seeks to move in harmony with the heavenly tendencies.

### *Śreṣṭha*

Śreṣṭhas and Tulādharas are roughly equal in number as residents and shopkeepers in Asan.<sup>36</sup> Prosperous shopkeepers and members of the Newar élite, the Śreṣṭhas are the economic counterparts of the Urāy, but they have generally been more successful at winning positions in government service. Asan Śreṣṭhas differ most from the Urāy in their adherence to Hindu cultural practices: calling a Brāhmaṇ priest for rituals, worshipping at Hindu shrines (but usually not Buddhist *stūpas*), and following the somewhat different Hindu festival cycle. Outside observers would rank these groups on an equal socio-economic footing, but both claim the other to be inferior. Except for the relatively rare friendship and an occasional common *guthi* membership, Urāy have little intimate social contact with Śreṣṭhas despite their living off common courtyards and lanes.<sup>37</sup>

Today, Tulādhar–Śreṣṭha rivalry goes beyond economics and status: it reaches deep into primordial sentiments about Newar culture. Many Tulādharas regard the Śreṣṭhas as having been opportunistic in relating to Parbatiyā political dominance and look down upon their having abandoned Buddhist elements of ‘true Newar culture’ while adopting the latter’s customs. Tulādharas point out many small differences between the two groups in terms of idiomatic language, household ritual, religious goals, and ethical standards.

### *Maharjans*

The Urāy have especially complicated and interwoven relations with this farmer caste, who form the single largest Newar group in the Kathmandu Valley.<sup>38</sup> Some Maharjan farmers once had regular seller–buyer relationships with Urāy households for their vegetables, a practice that has given way to more impersonal street selling. Many Urāy also have ties to Maharjan neighbours and tenants. Most Urāy–Maharjan links have their origins in the *jhārā* customs once maintained by landlords over cultivators, traditions that date back to Malla times (U. M. Malla 1972). Under a form of tenancy called *rakam*, the latter were required to perform many kinds of service for the landowner in addition to farming his land (M. C. Regmi 1976a: 156; Webster 1983: 143). In return, the Maharjan tenant kept one half of the harvest and participated in many sorts of prebendal services with the landlord. The legal basis for enforcing this service is no longer extant, but the expectation of service, which is woven intricately into old Urāy customs, still exists. In modern times, mon-



etary payments and feast shares must be offered to secure the Maharjans' services.

Urāy call upon both male and female Maharjans to deliver offerings to distant shrines, to assist at the time of special feasts, and deliver messages (recalling brides from their natal homes, or daughters to their natal homes, or relatives at the time of a death in the family). As these relationships are often long-standing and cross-generational, they are frequently warm and friendly. (Bonds that have survived have done so because of mutual friendship and generosity.) In Naradevī, such enduring close relations between Urāy and Maharjans have sustained a Pācaray Guthi that organizes special masked dances each year: today, when the Maharjans who now dance the parts of the great Hindu deities come at the yearly feast of the *guthi*, they are placed in a higher position of honour than other members. As a result, the seating order—an expression of status—puts them 'above' the Tulādhar members. This status-reversal is a source of teasing by other Urāy.<sup>39</sup>

In the Asan community, it is clear that the interdependency of Tulādhar landlords and Maharjan tenants has been breaking down rapidly. Many Maharjans have succeeded in weakening landlord dominance<sup>40</sup> either by claiming as their own the lands they once farmed as tenants or by refusing to turn over to the Urāy the proper grain payment. Some of the most common complaints in the Tulādhar community reflect these changes: 'their' Maharjans give reduced and substandard grain; they refuse to come when called to help, or if they do come, they come intoxicated; the Maharjans are now 'uppity'. The success of the Maharjans in land tenure disputes has been due to the unwillingness and/or inability of the Urāy to undertake the legal efforts necessary to enforce their prerogatives. In successfully claiming farmlands near the city, the Maharjans have gained some of the most valuable real estate in the Kathmandu Valley. Many have become wealthy so that quite naturally they refuse to come when called to do the menial tasks the merchant élite once depended upon them for.

The Urāy *guthis* have suffered from drastic cuts in their land endowment incomes and so many Urāy families have had to cut down the scale of their household religious observances. In Asan, over 20 per cent of the families have hired non-Newars as household servants to compensate, in part, for this breakdown. The growing economic independence among Maharjans proximate to Kathmandu town<sup>41</sup> has taken a toll on Urāy culture, a trend that the Tulādhar deplore but have been unable to resist.

### *Gwās*

This upper Maharjan sub-caste, as noted above, specializes in carrying out cremations at the burning grounds. Urāy families who are not members of a *sī guthi* or who have a *sanāḥ guthi* affiliation employ them to carry out this task in return for a cash payment.

*Didi Aji*

The Didi Aji, who is usually referred to simply as 'Aji', is the traditional midwife who usually comes from a Maharjan sub-caste or, more rarely, the Kāpālī caste. Before modern hospitals were available in Kathmandu, the Didi Aji would assist in the delivery of babies and in the postnatal care of the mother. Now that all Urāy babies are born in hospitals, the Aji's role has contracted to the rituals of birth pollution and to *jākwā*, the first rice feeding. Families still employ an Aji to give the new mother and child their daily massage with mustard oil in the first months after the birth (see Plate 11).

*Citrakār*

According to G. S. Nepali, the Citrakār caste is descended from a union between an Urāy woman and a low-caste man (1965: 170). Though ranked lower than the Maharjans in terms of classical pollution–purity criteria, the few true artists among the Citrakār are highly respected by the Urāy because they paint the secret Vajrayāna deities used in esoteric rituals. Before doing so, they must receive an initiation which is normally open to Urāy and Vajrācāryas only.

The interrelations between Urāy and the painter caste Citrakārs have also declined greatly in recent times. Formerly the Pū, as the Citrakārs are nicknamed, used to whitewash house walls on a regular basis, paint ritual objects used in Urāy life-cycle rituals, repaint the household Lakṣmī shrine in preparation for her annual worship during the festival of Swanti, the Newar New Year festival, and treat skin rashes.<sup>42</sup> Wealthy Urāy patrons would also commission the finest artists to paint frescoes on the outside house walls, an art form almost completely lost today. All of these services have declined as mass-produced and cheaper printed images have become readily available in the market while the Citrakārs have simultaneously moved into the lucrative field of commercial art and producing images for the tourist trade. With rare exceptions, the Citrakārs are now called only at the time of a wedding, when they repaint the ceremonial Pañca-Buddha entrance-way to every Urāy house.

*Nāpit*

The family barber (male or female) still finds a wide-scale business in many Tulādhār households, making regular rounds about every two weeks to cut nails with the sharp cutting blade, the *chalā*. The Nāpit's role as the men's regular hair cutter, however, has declined because of the popularity of Indian-style barber shops in Kathmandu that cater to style-conscious Newar men.

The Nāpit's hair-cutting service is still required for the monthly head-shaving that is obligatory for the chief mourner during the first year of mourning. Likewise, at the times when family purification is necessary (*saṃskāras*,

major feasts, etc.), the female Nāpit still comes to cut the family members' nails. (For those who prefer not to accept this service, the simple touch of the *chalā* is still ritually bestowed.)

### *Rajaka (Dhubyā)*

Urāy relations with this Washer caste still endure but in a much curtailed form. When the older style men's *daurā-surumāl* ('pant-coat') outfit was the common dress, the Rajaka's washing, ironing, and creasing services were essential. In the last decade, however, the choice of western 'ready-made' clothing has become the near-ubiquitous fashion. For this reason, the Tulādhars have turned away from the Rajakas as their old ways are thought to be too rough for these garments. As a result, the women of the house must now personally wash most of the household laundry.

### *Kāpālī*

This caste group of Newari-speaking musicians (traditional players of the *pañca bājā*) claim to be settled Gorakhnāthī *yogins* honoured by the Malla kings who gave them control over major public rest-houses and legal rights to receive certain offerings (Slusser and Vajracharya 1974: 210). Their history likely represents an archetypal case study of Newar society assimilating an entire Indian group over generations.

The Urāy Gūlā *bājās* used to employ Kāpālī oboe (*mwāḥli*) players. Among themselves, Kāpālī families have established territorial rights to determine who receives a portion of every family feast in Asan as well as specified offerings of articles and foods prepared by a mourning family for its departed ancestors. On such occasions, the Kāpālī representative still comes to receive the group's due from the hands of the Urāy women.

### *Damāī*

Although the Damāī, a low Parbatiyā caste group, are traditionally leather-workers and tailors in Kathmandu, they have broadened their economic activities to include professional musicianship playing western wind instruments (clarinets, flutes, trombones, tubas, etc.). For their services as musicians, Urāy hire Damāī to accompany their wedding processions and the Gūlā *bājā*. At such occasions, especially for feasting, Urāy are careful to segregate themselves from their Damāī accompanists.

### *Dyaḥlā*

Before the building of the sewerage system in Asan in the early 1960s, Newar Untouchables (Urāy usually say 'Cyāmakhalah') used to clean out the toilets of bazaar residents and then sell the nightsoil to Maharjan farmers for their fields as part of the traditional ecological system.

Dyaḥlās now clean the public streets in return for payment by the city government. But individual families living on common courtyards still band

together and pay to have them clean this space regularly. When Dyahlā workers do come, Urāy parents still instruct their children not to get too close to the sweepers and never allow any physical contact with them.

### Summary: Inter-caste relations in Asan

Although there are examples of less stringent Urāy adherence to classical Indic caste norms as compared to the Hindu Śreṣṭhas, it is still the case that the ideology of caste pervades the entire Newar urban community. Urāy women guard the purity of their homes and hearth according to a guest's caste just as rituals that have multi-caste participation are caste-segregated: Damāī musicians must not eat in the same line with Tulādhār Gūlā *bājā* members; and parents still insist on their children avoiding Untouchables. Just as the city space was traditionally laid out to conform with caste ranking, so are personal relationships 'distanced' according to rules governing acceptable status contact. In this realm, we can see clearly the extent to which high-caste Newars—Hindu and Buddhist—adhere to their Indic heritage of caste orthopraxy.

## 4. Concluding Ethnohistorical Reflections: *The Urāy and Malla Polity*

### 4.1. The Meaning of Samyak and Kumār Pyākhā

All the great Newar religious festivals can be analysed as cultural performances replete with layers of information regarding the polity's socio-political, religious, economic, and artistic history. A typology of Newar festivals could be created on the basis of the extent of movement through the city, the number of castes involved organizationally, temporal duration, etc., with the most significant reaching the royal palace and claiming the king's involvement. Our study of the Urāy points to two such cultural performances of the first order, Samyak and Kumār Pyākhā, that open up lines of ethnohistorical analysis (cf. Oppitz 1974). Given the dearth of research on the Malla era, the remarks here are of necessity preliminary and heuristic.<sup>43</sup>

It would indeed be possible to organize a discussion of Kathmandu city's Buddhist history, its principal communities, and the local sense of religious geography by examining the structure and components of the Samyak festival. Samyak tradition assembles a microcosm of Newar civilization, from king to peasant labourers, artisans to priests, each with a defined role. The festival organizing process is itself dynamic: every twelve years, it is the occasion for certifying group boundaries, unifying each sub-group, and asserting the Buddhist tradition's cosmic order through a grand religious celebration. The religious geography of Kathmandu *deśa* is also articulated, drawing together

Newar Buddhists and all major deities (except Bunga Dyah)<sup>44</sup> from settlements across the Kathmandu and the Banepa Valleys. We have also seen how the social hierarchy of the local Buddhist lay community is very precisely reckoned for Samyak through the division of labour that organizes a mass ritual donation to the Buddhist deities and to the local Newar *saṃgha*, i.e. to Śākyas and Vajrācāryas.

In addition to the redistribution of wealth and the intensive cultural employment that occurs, this communal giving to the Newar *saṃgha* asserts the pre-eminence of Newar *gurus*, who sit alongside celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Yet again simultaneously, Samyak is also the most conspicuous occasion for patrons and devotees to spend their wealth for garnering merit (*puṇya*) while enhancing their prestige among peers through the display of immense, gilded images. For the Urāy especially, Samyak is the occasion when their Buddhist identity is emphatically asserted. During this festival, the Urāy are most clearly *upāsakas*, energetic and devout followers of Buddha, Saṃgha, and Dharma. The prominence of families with Lhasa trading ties—as former sponsors and active organizers—underlines the point that the wealth of this mercantile élite has largely underwritten the construction of many Kathmandu *vihāras*, *stūpas*, and temples (Lewis 1993a, 1993b).

The Samyak festival also reflects on the nature of the relationship that once existed between the Malla kings and local Buddhist traditions. On the first evening of Samyak, all the images from private homes and public temples are brought to the Palace, where they receive offerings from the royal family and the general public. Next day, all process to a field at the south-east of Svayambhū hill. Seated on a roofed observation platform [which in 1980 and 1993 was surmounted by a *stūpa*], the king then observes while the assembled deities and the *saṃgha* receive special offerings. Many royal symbolisms operate: gathering all deities from peripheries to the palace defines and blesses the royal palace as sacred centre; the royal family gives patronage in return for blessings (day 1), then acts as the pre-eminent lay devotee—along with hundreds of wealthy, image-bearing families—to join in a mass offering ceremony on day 2 that in theory includes every member of every Newar *saṃgha*.

Unlike other great Buddhist festivals that involve royal participation—Bunga Dyah Jātrā (Owens 1989), Indra Jātrā (Lewis 1984: 374–9)—Samyak has no well-known Hindu theory or gloss which explains the ritual for those who wish to define themselves as Hindus and justifies their participation in it. What endures reflects a Malla festival that orchestrates a strong statement of imperial support for every major Buddhist deity (except Bunga Dyah) and for every local *saṃgha*. In turn, the festival certifies the legitimation of the ruler through his actions as defender and patron of Buddhism. Samyak's ritual 'grammar' is strongly Buddhist: the king sits below a *stūpa* and the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas adhere to an ancient norm allowing no member of the *saṃgha* to

bow to a ruler,<sup>45</sup> similar to state-*saṃgha* procedures in South-East Asia (Tambiah 1976). These symbolic gestures of Buddhism's pre-eminence were the Buddhist constituency's 'price' for creating the grand spectacle conferring legitimacy on the monarch. The Samyak ceremonies were witnessed by thousands in Malla times, when the majority of the population was probably orientated toward Buddhist deities and the services of a Vajrācārya priesthood.

This is not to deny that the Malla palace's support for Buddhism was secondary to its competing Hindu-Brahmanical orientation. But Malla regard for Tibetan lamas (Lewis and Jamspal 1988) and their appointing Bhutanese lamas as caretakers of Svayambhū in 1673 (Aris 1980: 249) should be noted to offset any image of their being sectarian Hindus. The Kathmandu court thus occupied a middle position accepting the religious diversity of the Valley. But it is also certain that the Mallas did not go as far as conforming to the textual ideals of Buddhist kingship: there is no record that they ever engaged in any of the 'purifications of the *saṃgha*' that contemporaneous kings of Burma, Thailand, or Sri Lanka were instituting.

The royal cult to Durgā-Taleju provides another inter-religious study. Recall how the Urāy take a leading position among Kathmandu's Buddhist laymen: two groups dance as Kumār and Daitya in the service of the Kathmandu ruler's rituals to the goddess regarded as protectress of the ruling line. This is another simulacrum of exchanges in the local polity: by taking on the Kumār role, the Urāy express their alliance with the king and symbolically focus their religious power, derived from Vajrayāna tradition, towards the preservation of the Malla state; in return, the king acknowledges the Buddhists' high standing in society and the pragmatic power of their religious tradition. The special interdependence between Kathmandu royalty and Buddhist merchants is one key historical relationship that is evident in the surviving customs.<sup>46</sup>

Nor should this analysis stop with 1769: the Shah dynasty has adopted Malla customs for Samyak and Taleju, as in their support of many other local Newar traditions that confer ritual protection on the Valley's monarch. In the Kumār Pyākhā as well, the Urāy continue to perform their ritual duty, despite the change in dynasty. Why? In recent times, there has been occasional government coercion when Urāy youngsters were loath to submit to the training and abstentions involved. For the community to suspend participation would be tantamount to disloyalty to the royal family.

The endurance of Kumār Pyākhā may also be read as an indication of enduring Urāy support for the modern state.<sup>47</sup> It is important to recall that a turning-point in the Valley's conquest was the disaffection of Kathmandu merchants for Malla kings who were unable to end Prithivi Narayan's blockade on trade (Stiller 1973); note that even under the hated Ranas, trade flourished and the Ranas acted on behalf of Newars in Lhasa (L. E. Rose 1971: 123; Uprety 1980). M. C. Regmi has noted (1976a: 70) that of all the venues in the Valley where the Shahs annexed Newar lands, Kathmandu was the least af-





PLATE 4. The Samyak Festival of 1980: the King and Queen of Nepal witness the *dāna* and receive honours from the Buddhist elders. (The Queen did not attend in 1993; nor did the senior Vajrācāryas bow down to the King's feet in 1993, which had been considered controversial in 1980.) (Richard English)

fect, by a factor of *seven* compared to Lalitpur (4,751 *muris* versus 695). This points to an early *rapprochement* between the Urāy and Shah kings.

I suggest that despite areas of keen resentment against the non-Newar rulers, mutual interests and outward respect endured between the Urāy and the state. (In the early decades of this century, for example, several Urāy families of Asan were leading musicians and dramatists performing at the Rana court.) In the Taleju rites each year, the Urāy continue dancing as Kumār because their community still prospers by honouring a long-standing alliance with their polity's king.

#### 4.2. The Urāy and Tibetan relations

A particularly characteristic element of Urāy group dynamics when compared with other Newar groups (found otherwise only among some Śākya) was the practice of Urāy men living in Tibet and marrying Tibetan women. For the most part, the traders kept their twin families separated by the Himalayas,<sup>48</sup> but occasionally half-Tibetan females returned to Kathmandu, where they married Urāy boys and were absorbed into Urāy patrilineages. These female *khacarās* (from Nepali, 'half-breed goat') were absorbed with only minor status reper-

cussions, but *khacarā* sons were not of acceptable status for marriage to proper Urāy girls and were most unwelcome in Kathmandu, although some did travel there and settle.<sup>49</sup> The 'semi-permeability' of Urāy lineages with Tibetans, of course, is in distinct contrast with high-caste Hindu Newars, for whom such alliances were unthinkable. Here, then, is a major point of contrast between Hindu and Buddhist Newar merchant groups.

Recent studies of Tibetan records on the Kathmandu Valley in the Malla era (Lewis and Jamspal 1988; Lewis 1989c) help to explain the unique evolution of the Urāy as a separate caste only in Kathmandu, the Newar city most dominated by Tibetan traders. In Kathmandu, ties with Tibet were uniquely important. Malla Kathmandu *deśa*'s complex relationship between Newar kings, diaspora merchants, and Tibetan lamas developed in a three-sided, synergistic manner:

- (a) *Urāy diaspora merchants* firmly established Kathmandu on the periphery of the web of Tibetan monasticism (Miller 1960) through their patronage; standard merit-making motives for inviting great lamas to Kathmandu coincided with business interest in having sound relationships with the Tibetan government (Lewis 1989c).
- (b) *Newar kings of Kathmandu* profited handsomely from the success of Kathmandu merchant families trading in Tibet (M. C. Regmi 1971: 24–5; Toffin 1990); adherence to norms of Indic kingship motivated patronage of lamas; Malla royalty's belief in the saintliness and healing power of lamas was also evident (Lewis and Jamspal 1988).
- (c) *Tibetan lamas* valued the Kathmandu Valley as a religious centre, source of texts, as a venue for establishing satellite institutions, and as the territory of generous patrons.

In the regional context, then, the Malla kings had many reasons to support the Tibetan lamas in their midst while the rich and successful Urāy had motivations to underline their strong Buddhist character as a distinctive group boundary marker. Prestige and high social standing were derived from being Buddhist patrons, making donations to build and restore local Buddhist monuments, and associating with individuals of high spiritual pedigree. In late Malla times, Tibetan lamas were among the Valley's most prominent Buddhists, and local *gumbās* (Tib. 'monasteries') important landmarks. Perhaps Samyak also suggests elements of Newar Buddhist boundary maintenance *vis-à-vis* Tibetan lamas?

Thus, Urāy alliances with Tibetan wives and lamas, fundamental to their mercantile prosperity, life-style, and spiritual inclinations involved major deviations from the norms of Brahmanical orthopraxy; this Buddhist community was thereby out of step with the cultural tide that marked the later stages of the Malla dynasty and continued further with Shah–Rana rule. The Mallas were comfortable with this anomaly but the Shahs and Ranas did not emulate the Mallas' regard for Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, the logic of Urāy economy and



pluralistic culture, uniquely straddling both worlds, came to contradict the Brahmanical spirit of modern Nepal, a Hindu state. Consorting with Tibetans—who were seen as close to Untouchables in the state codes (Höfer 1979)—compromised one's presence at court and the 'purity of place' in high-caste residential areas of Kathmandu proximate to the Palace. The Urāy-Vajrācārya dispute hinged on the problem of Tibetan lamas compromising high-caste Newar Buddhist purity in Brahmanical terms (Lewis 1989c). This same contradictory tension also surfaced when Rana prime ministers insisted that Newar traders returning from Tibet perform Brahmanical purification ceremonies. As in many other spheres, the new state's formation caused a shift in Newar caste boundary maintenance and in ethnic group definitions (Levine 1987).

#### 4.3. Defining factional lines in Malla polities

Relatedness always implies a universe of non-relations . . . contained in every opening outward is a tendency toward closure inward and in every bond a series of alienations.

Robert Murphy (1971: 154)

*Lwāye nā ma phu*      ('Can't fight  
*Milay nā ma ju.*      Or unite.')

Newar proverb

Perhaps what discourages scholars of Newar civilization most is the complexity in diversity evident in the Kathmandu Valley's towns and villages. Each is its own case study, different in dialect, caste names, priesthoods, etc., and it is problematic to generalize beyond one's fieldwork. As the proverb above indicates, a factionalized social fabric is also self-evident to the Newars.

The foregoing presentation of Urāy social organization underlines the importance that Newars place in maintaining caste divisions: most Newar cultural performances today function to assert group exclusiveness and pride. In Malla times, caste groups were important actors in socio-economic-political discourse *vis-à-vis* royalty. *Deślā guthis* maximized on the logic of group representation and contestation in the royal court. As in Lalitpur (Slusser 1982: 124), *twāḥ* and caste leaders in Malla Kathmandu often became influential figures in the city-state, with religious affiliation—along Hindu-Buddhist lines—a central element in maintaining identity and loyalty among contending factions. Each side developed a broad array of priesthoods and institutions that competed for patronage and cultural employment across the social order—kings, merchants, and the masses. One simplified representation of the Kathmandu Valley's religious field in full ethnohistorical scope is shown in Fig. 2.3.

On the 'Hindu' side, the Malla dynasty retained ties to Mithila civilization (Bihar), especially through their recruitment of Brāhmaṇ priests and court

officials; their practice of entrusting the care of the Valley's most important Hindu shrine (Paśupati) to south Indian Brāhmaṇs is also diagnostic of their Indic/Hindu allegiance. Malla kings conformed to Indic norms of royal patronage by supporting all worthy religious traditions and several forms of Buddhism were the prominent focal points in their patronage. Still, Brāhmaṇs and Brahmanical traditions dominated the socio-legal order, Tantric Hindu Karmācāryas maintained royal cults such that Hindu priestly castes and temples claimed the chief loyalty of the élite who ruled Kathmandu *deśa* over the later Malla period.

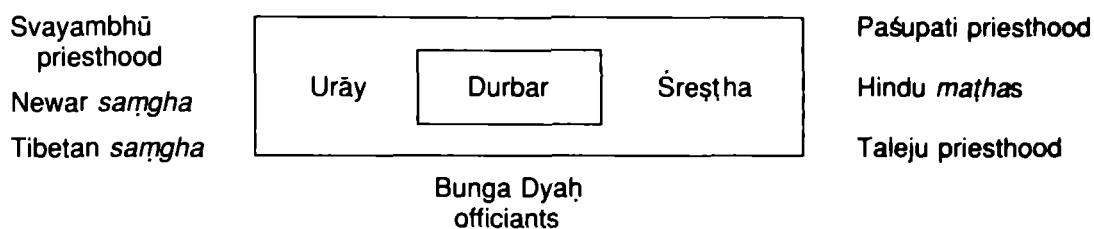


FIG. 2.3. Hindu and Buddhist constituencies in the Malla era

Arrayed alongside this 'Hindu' order were the Buddhist merchants, artisans, royal retainers with ties to established *saṃghas* and monasteries. (The 'reli-gious field' here also extends beyond Newar ethnic boundaries: the northern foreigners from Tibet centred at Svayambhū and Bauddha mirror the southerners at Paśupati.) For the peasant masses who relied upon Vajrācāryas for most of their ritual needs and focused upon celestial Bodhisattvas for supramundane hopes (Gellner 1992), Mahāyāna Buddhism remained their chief refuge. The Newar kings of Kathmandu made outward peace with local Buddhism while blurring its boundaries; Urāy customs reflect the dramatic efforts by these later Malla rulers—and their successors—to secure the loyalty of the polity's Buddhist majority and to sustain the pan-Himalayan relationships conducive to enduring mercantile success that supported their kingdom.

### Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who made my research in this neighbourhood so rewarding; special thanks to Labh Ratna, Nati Vajra, Sanu Raja, Suman Kamal, Siddhartha Man, Subarna Man, Hera, Double, and the children of Dagu Baha. I would like to thank Suman Kamal, Nirmal Man, and Siddhartha Man Tuladhar for reading this manuscript and making many helpful comments. The editors of this volume also made many useful queries, comments, and corrections that improved the final text. Finally, thanks go to Joel Villa of the Holy Cross Audio-Visual Dept., who printed the plates.
2. Figure 2.1 indicates this area and gives the major sub-neighbourhoods along with other internal locality names. Each lane radiating out from the crossroads has its own sub-neighbourhood name so that sometimes residents along these routes affix

'Asan' to the name of their locality (e.g. 'Asan-Kamalāchi'). (My initial research focused upon the area bounded by this linguistic designation.) One of these old thoroughfares leads directly to the royal palace at the centre of the old city, another to the city's major bus terminus.

3. The wholesale grain market used to be located right on the streets of Asan. Now it is in Mahā Buddha, an open space around a large *stūpa* on the eastern edge of town, just south of central Asan.
4. Due to high Indian import duties on foreign-made goods, a large part of Kathmandu's import business is directed towards Indian buyers who smuggle their purchases from Nepal back across the very permeable border. In competition for this very lucrative trade and in other unofficial markets (i.e. 'secondary' or 'black market' economies), Newars have lost ground to other Nepali traders (Manangis, Sherpas) and to the most dominant players, the leading Indian diaspora traders, the Marwaris.
5. This is a quality of Newar settlements noted by almost every commentator from Father Giuseppe (1801) onward. Epidemics due to traditional poor public health standards may have been an important factor in Newar civilization, as was the case elsewhere in the pre-modern world. A Tibetan visitor in 1723 reports a serious multi-year epidemic decimating the country in the hot season (Lewis and Jamspal 1988).

Modern Newars say that the town used to be much cleaner. The old sweeper system that relied on Untouchable labour ensured that the city streets were swept twice a day; now under city government control, only the main streets are swept once daily. Cows still roam the streets, another part of the old system of recycling waste. The older practice of people defecating in nearby rice paddy-fields has also ended as new buildings now occupy these locations. In 1987 a local association began a dramatic series of moves to reverse the public health situation and they began in Asan: young leaders ensured that new laws limiting street-selling were enforced, provided each shopkeeper with a waste-bin, and hounded residents to keep their house areas clean (*Himal*, 1988, 3). This initiative had dissipated by 1991.

6. Information regarding house ownership was obtained by means of a house-to-house survey done by my Newar assistant Sanu Vajracharya and myself over a three-month period in the spring of 1981. Using land registry maps, we ascertained the caste identity of each map-designated resident unit. We also used our cross-Asan sample of households to determine that the average household size was 6.9 people. An in-depth census of Asan would render more exact results; funds and time were lacking for such a time-consuming and problematic task. Still, the point should be underlined: population and rudimentary demographic research are necessary for progress in studies on Newar society.
7. This geographic separation, even if only one kilometre from the old quarters but outside the town walls, has often made families (especially women) feel uncomfortable at being cut off from their families and community.
8. According to Nepalese law, shop space in the ground floor of the house can be separated from the house, divided in inheritance by brothers, or sold off outright. (The last is still a relatively rare occurrence and we found still fewer instances of settled Asan Newars selling off whole houses to non-Newars.) In 1982 the talk of

Asan was a dispute among Tulādhar brothers: one wanted to sell off one-third of a small shop to his coheirs. For roughly 100 square feet, he was demanding two *lakhs* (200,000 rupees).

9. Asan is as pluralistic ethnically and culturally as any old bazaar in the world. Modern life continues to change in terms of shifting allegiance to business, family, and religious traditions. Especially visible among the prosperous are all sorts of mass media technologies; since 1986 television has also competed for free hours and limited resources. Such stimuli also vie with myriad older ties and commitments to one's kin and caste community. Some of the oldest traditional Newar observances are still kept in Asan families while in other households there are some individuals who want as little as possible to do with the old fashions. Urban life-styles among Asan residents thus include the possibility of *withdrawing* in an unprecedented way from traditional observances and into individualistic pursuits, a situation quite different from the Newar village. All told, Asan's urban life is so deeply layered and richly varied that residents *themselves* experience their city's impersonal qualities while accepting that outside their *tmāh* their own society and culture can only be known in fragments.
10. Parbatīyās are referred to routinely in Asan as *khēy* in Newari. This term is an informal Tibeto-Burman derivation from the Sanskrit term *khas*, an early ethnic group name common in the Sulej Himalayas later adopted as a surname across the northern frontier of India. This slang usage is in line with a host of traditional terms that Newars use to tease other castes.
11. The relationship is more complex than merely noting that the market can afford to buy culture. In fact, both are interconnected on a multitude of levels: (1) With every *pūjā*, there is a feast; for every feast, a long shopping list, and hence a visit to the market; (2) half of the year's business profits in Asan come in the autumn month between Mohanī and Swanti; (3) *pūjā* should also be seen as a system of economic redistribution to priests, holy men, beggars, animals of the urban ecological niche. The overall impact of the vast Newar cultural repertoire is to intensify the volume of exchange and to extend the webs of family and caste interconnection.
12. The important role of *vaiśyas* in South Asian history—from antiquity up to the modern industrialist Tatas—remains underrepresented in Indological historiography. There has been some scholarship concerned with merchants in South Asian history, especially Hazlehurst (1968), Gokhale (1977), Lamb (1959), Tambiah (1973), Fox (1973), and Khachikian (1966). Rhys-Davids (1901) is also a useful source. Curtin's (1984) extensive bibliography lists other Indian sources.
13. In small Newar settlements across the Nepalese mid-hills, the surnames 'Tulādhar' and 'Udās' are encountered (Lewis and Shakyā 1988) and usually can be traced to children of marriages between Śākya and Vajrācārya men and non-Newar women. But there are no known marriages between the Urāy in the Kathmandu Valley and such 'out-Valley' lineages. It is interesting to note that the logic of Newar caste extends to such communities hundreds of miles from Kathmandu and not surprising that the Nepali term, not the Kathmandu one ('Urāy'), is used.
14. Tulādharers dislike the Nepali name for them—Udās—for it may also be translated 'sad'.
15. The classical reference to the 'Five Prohibited Professions' is found in the Pali Canon (*Āṅguttara Nikāya*, i) and mentioned in various *jātaka* compilations, al-

though modern Urāy informants did not cite any well-known passage. The Urāy and general Newar commitment to non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in personal relations is striking, as violent crimes have been extremely rare in the history of Asan and Kathmandu. Non-violence in regard to lower life forms is also an Urāy characteristic and I have written elsewhere about a popular text featuring this teaching (Lewis 1993c) and touched upon the public health implications of this view (Lewis 1989b). In their ritual practices, especially regarding animal sacrifice, Urāy *ahiṃsā* may be a recent 'reform' that some Tulādhar today ascribe to the influence of Theravāda Buddhism.

16. Note that the Tāmraḱār of Kathmandu are Buddhist and do not intermarry with Lalitpur lineages of the same surname who are mostly Hindu in religious orientation.
17. My attempts to use the webs of *āgā dyaḥ* and *digu dyaḥ* connections for historical purposes have been unsuccessful, in large part because the shrines and records are subject to secrecy. Theoretically, the system points back to one apical ancestor, but as the first, then later family generations split, ornaments and images were divided.
18. Here, Buddhist kinship and identity likely shielded *Dharmaśāstra*-based sentiments from group reckoning: no high-caste Hindu lineage would tolerate intermarriage with Tibetans, who as yak (= cow) meat eaters would have been scorned by Newar Hindu castes (Höfer 1979).
19. In practice, few people can trace back even five generations in female lines of descent.
20. According to Shepard (1985), this Kathmandu group may be anomalous in breaking town endogamy: some families have recorded marriages with Rājkarṇikār of Lalitpur, some of whom in Lalitpur today call themselves 'Tulādhar' through these connections. (Few in Asan knew of this side-bar in Uray genealogy.) Through them (in quite small numbers), then, Kathmandu Urāy do in fact extend their marriage circle as well. As Gellner notes in a personal communication (1989), Kathmandu Rājkarṇikār may all be originally from Lalitpur. Moreover, 'Rājkarṇikār are not traditionally part of the Tulādhar *et al.* [i.e. Urāy], but due to their wealth and the fact that some Tulādhar *et al.* were traditionally Marikaḥmi, those originally Lalitpur Rājkarṇikār who have been a long time in Kathmandu have succeeded in getting themselves accepted as Tulādhar *et al.* Because of their traditional links with Lalitpur, which they have also maintained, the seemingly anomalous situation . . . came about. . . Perhaps permeation by other Newars, who can always be claimed *ex post facto* to be of the same status, is one kind of Hindu-acceptable permeation, whereas establishing unions with Tibetans is another Buddhist-influenced but Hindu-unacceptable permeation . . . Tuladhar *et al.* practise both, but Śreṣṭhas only the former.'
21. Samyak draws all Newar Buddhists together with the nation's king to Svayambhū, where they make great stores of merit by worshipping the major Buddhist divinities of the Kathmandu Valley and feeding all males of the Vajrācārya and Śākya *saṃghas*. There is evidence that the Samyak *guthi* started around 1580 (Locke 1985: 288). The festival form is doubtless related to the textual grand ancient Indic *dāna* festivals called *pañcavārṣika* (Strong 1990; Beal 1970 edn. i. 232 and elsewhere in Hsuan Tsang). Up until forty years ago, individual families could sponsor a Samyak by meeting all the feasting and ritual costs and by constructing their own image of Dīpaṃkara Buddha and other accompanying icons. See the discussion in

Section 4 regarding this festival and Kumār Pyākḥā (below) as simulacra for reading the nature of Kathmandu as Malla polity united by imperial Buddhist ritualism.

22. These proceedings, closed to outsiders, act out a mythological understanding that is superimposed on the social/spatial order of Kathmandu City: Kumār, war deity of the heavens, is drawn from the peripheral Urāy; from central Maru Twāḥ, in like manner symbolic of the underworld's master, a Tāmrakār dancer incarnates Daitya; finally, the king completes the triple world's symbolism as the human realm's protector and worshipper of the goddess Taleju.
23. I will return to this Urāy tradition in Section 4 to show how this dance and Samyak provide reference points for defining the contours of Kathmandu polity of the Malla era. Note here how Kathmandu is a different country, separate from Lalitpur and Bhaktapur; caste names, boundaries, history are unique to it.
24. In 1982 only the Asan and Naradevī Tulādḥars, the Kel Twāḥ Kamsakārs, and the Maru Twāḥ Tāmrakārs still maintained the Gūlā bājā traditions. Among these, only Asan Tulādḥars still played *dhāḥ* drums.
25. Gūlā bājā musicianship and procedures are highly developed; for a fuller treatment of Gūlā activities, see Lewis (1993d).
26. This pan-Newar myth is linked to the Bhatbhatini settlement several kilometres north-east of Asan (Slusser 1982: 364). The lack of any significant archaeological research in the Kathmandu Valley renders such folklore merely speculative. Locke has pointed out that many *digu dyah* of Śākya and Vajrācārya families can be traced to Sankhu (1985: 517).
27. In recent times, one sign of withdrawal from the old ways of socializing is resignation from the cremation *guthi* of one's forefathers and arranging for family cremations independently on a service payment basis. This is often encountered when brothers divide up their ancestral house because of a dispute: one will retain the *guthi* bond, the other will drop all ties and 'go it alone'.
28. A brother who splits up from a single household will seek to postpone the *guthi*'s recognizing his separation since his household constitutes a new unit of membership. According to the rules, new family heads must be added immediately into the *pāhlāḥmha* rotation and serve next in that role.
29. Due to the early debates in Buddhological circles on the attitude of the Buddha to caste, the association of Buddhist tradition with caste practices may seem irregular, but such a view is contrary to the history of the Indo-Tibetan tradition. In fact, there is no inherent incompatibility between Buddhist doctrine and a caste society. Although there is debate on the hierarchy of aspirant groups, with the Buddhists arguing for the superiority of the *bhikṣus* over the Brāhmaṇs and the Buddha over all *devas*, Buddhist traditions, especially on the popular story-telling level, clearly equate high-caste rebirth with good *karma* and the innate proclivity for advanced spiritual attainment. Likewise, those groups at the bottom, especially Chandalas, are looked down upon even by 'good Buddhists' in the Jātaka texts (Rhys-Davids 1901: 869).

Portions of the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna tradition also accepted the fact of caste hierarchy among human beings (Stablein 1978: 532). Even in Tibet, untouchable-like groups were recognized (Gombo 1982). The social history of India has shown that once caste is the established basis of social life, kin groups had little choice but to enter society by joining with kin as a corporate unit. In Malla Nepal, had

Buddhist devotees not conformed to proper high-class social practice (especially in terms of the appropriate pollution–purity rules), they would not have sustained residence in the cities ruled by kings using Brahmanical models in arranging and governing their kingdoms. In this and other areas, contemporary Newar studies should inform the wider field of Indian Buddhist history.

30. Urāy women do not undergo their monthly periods with the same rigorous restrictions as do Śreṣṭha women; nor do they observe the Tīj festival, as Śreṣṭha women may do.
31. The Urāy do not touch cows reverently, as Hindu Newars do.
32. See Rosser (1966). Urāy reverence for a Tibetan lama, especially their eating *prasād* from his hands, brought to a head the contradiction high-caste Buddhists attempted to maintain: Brahmanical orthopraxy versus ultimate allegiance to and respect for Buddhist holiness. Vajrācārya factions that opted to define themselves as upholding Brahmanical orthopraxy first, denying the fact of commensal relations with the Urāy, have to this day been ostracized by the Asan Tulādhars and have only lower caste *jajmāns* to serve.
33. S. M. Greenwold's suggestion that Vajrācāryas really 'won the day' (1981: 101) has been so only symbolically: this dispute resulted in widespread cultural unemployment for most Vajrācārya lineages, undermined Urāy patronage of the Newar *saṃgha*, and created a rift that helped Tibetan lamas and Theravāda missionaries.
34. There is variation across the Urāy sub-groups: Kaṃsakārs do not observe this custom; all Urāy send a bronze anklet (called *tuti bakī*) except for the Tulādhars, who send a silver bracelet (*kalyā*).
35. The Joṣī caste is not the only one that can provide an astrological specialist, however. In Asan, several Vajrācārya priests and one Tulādhar layman in Asan were also casting horoscopes in 1982.
36. In this context, note that I am lumping all categories of Śreṣṭha into one since, as Quigley points out in this volume (Ch. 3), internal subdivisional caste rankings are of importance only internally, not to outsiders.
37. Urāy refer to all Śreṣṭhas using the derogatory 'Śeśyaḥ'. In the same spirit, Śreṣṭhas challenge the pureness of Urāy lineages and tell a number of stories at their expense which end with the Urāy trying to explain his caste history with the rhyming exclamation: 'Chu dhāye, chu dhāye? . . . Urāy.' ('What to say, what to say . . . Urāy.')
38. See Gellner and Pradhan's Ch. 5 below on the complex array of urban Maharjan communities.
39. Interestingly, until recent years a Tulādhar dancer danced the masked part of Mahādeva, the chief deity in the drama.
40. The Maharjans have also pursued agricultural innovations (rice varieties, chemical fertilizers) which have increased their yields dramatically—but the Urāy have not benefited because the landlord's share was fixed according to 1964 Land Reform standards (Webster 1983: 144).
41. In Kathmandu, the community with the most evident expressions of cultural revival are the Maharjans. Some of the notable recent patronage events in the Buddhist community, e.g. Pañcadān, have been performed by Maharjans. The caste exclusiveness of the Vajrācārya leaders who are guardians of traditional Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism hinders the Newar *saṃgha* from attracting the support

of this *nouveau riche* population. Theravāda institutions have been heavily patronized by the new Maharjan 'middle class'.

42. When people get a skin rash called *jala nāgā nyāyegu*, the folk treatment includes having a Citrakār paint two lions on the skin at the edges of the rash to arrest its spread.
43. For the Kathmandu Samyak, there has been some preliminary documentation (Sakya 1979; Tulādhār 1979). Although the Samyak of 1980 was felt by its organizers possibly to be the last that the *guthi* could successfully undertake due to the immense logistical and financial requirements and the lack of interest among younger generations, it was held again in 1993, albeit one year late and with some rituals attenuated. My information on this festival comes from observations from both the 1980 and 1993 festivals. Research film (Lewis 1982) and video (Lewis 1994a) of the Kathmandu Samyak festivals are found in the Human Area Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. On the Lalitpur Samyak, see Gellner (1992: 181–5).
44. The common explanation of this one deity's absence from the Kathmandu Samyak is his disapproval of the wastage of food in the rituals.
45. A major controversy erupted in 1980 when a few honoured senior Vajrācāryas went forward to receive special gifts from King Birendra's hands, then prostrated at his feet. Vajrācāryas in the audience called out derisively at this breach of custom and still denounce these seniors years later for their betrayal of their *saṃgha* traditions. (This was not repeated in 1993.)
46. There were several striking differences in the observances from 1980 to 1993. First, there was an ongoing narration describing the unfolding events by a master of ceremonies who spoke in *both* Newari and Nepali. Secondly, the Prime Minister attended the event along with a large foreign diplomatic entourage. Thirdly, King Birendra's engagement was notably more outgoing in 1993: unlike in 1980 when he quickly exited after the formal rituals concluded, he now walked into the crowded lines of deities for *darśan* and stayed to ask questions of the organizers about the festival.
47. Seemingly implausible in the light of contemporary developments, this conclusion is in keeping with later Malla history which shows that contending Newar élites made alliances with non-Newars to further their own sub-group's intra-Newar struggles. Recall that Lalitpur requested that Prithivi Narayan rule over their polity and that Newar merchants conducted the trade of Rama Shah of Gorkha (Stiller 1973: 29).
48. But these spatially separated worlds were merged after 1959, when many Tibetans fled Tibet with the Dalai Lama. Once the Kathmandu Valley became a prominent refugee centre, many Tibetan wives and half-Tibetan children of Urāy fathers showed up in Kathmandu and claimed the right to maintenance support and a share of the family's inheritance. Quite a number of Asan families have stories of domestic upheaval caused by such contingencies (Lewis 1993a).
49. Further research should try to document life histories of this group and their role in local Tibetan Buddhism (Jest 1993). Today, several *khacarās* are prominent lamas in the Tibetan Buddhist world. It is my impression that a small community of these lineages has existed in Kathmandu for many centuries and that there has been intermarriage between the Urāy and other Tibetan settlers.



# Śreṣṭhas: Heterogeneity among Hindu Patron Lineages

*Declan Quigley*

## *1. Introduction: Is there a Śreṣṭha Caste?*

Of all Newar castes the Śreṣṭhas are the most difficult to categorize.\* Indeed it is hazardous to describe them as a caste at all and it is this hazard, and the ways in which it is best approached, which will form the central theme of this chapter. Toffin has written (1984: 382) that ‘the Śreṣṭhas, one of the most numerous groups in Newar society, deserve less and less to be described as a caste’. In the following discussion, I will support this view: in fact, it is doubtful whether Śreṣṭhas have ever been a single caste in the way that castes are normally thought to be—i.e. with a relatively homogeneous status.

Whatever unity Śreṣṭhas are observed to have (or to have had in the past) derives from the fact that their traditional function is to patronize other groups. From the outside, this function of patronage imbues all Śreṣṭhas with a shared high status. For non-Śreṣṭhas, Śreṣṭhas are those lineages which are owed respect because it is primarily they who command the services of others. To be a Śreṣṭha is to be the patron of other castes, whether these other castes provide ritual specialists, craftsmen, or agricultural labour.

From the inside, however, Śreṣṭhas are endlessly fragmented. There is continual dispute about whether particular families, or particular lineages, merit the status of Śreṣṭha at all and, among those that do, what ‘quality’ of Śreṣṭha they are—aristocratic, commoner, *nouveau-arrivé*, fallen, or pretender. Śreṣṭhas are an aggregation of groups rather than a singular group and the differences between these groups are fundamental to the way in which Śreṣṭhas perceive themselves. To some extent it could be said that all castes are aggregations and are thus internally differentiated, at least according to kinship connections and marriage alliances.<sup>1</sup> But most castes, particularly those which are associated with a particular ritual function, tend to be seen, both internally and externally, as relatively undifferentiated when it comes to status.

The reason for the pronounced fragmentation among Śreṣṭhas, in one sentence, is that not all of them have, or had in the past, the same powers of patronage. The range in variation in both the kinds and numbers of specialists employed by Śreṣṭhas is enormous. Some Śreṣṭhas have Brāhmaṇ (Rājopādhyāya) family priests (*purohit*); others, including some of those with the most aristocratic origins, call Buddhist Vajrācāryas. Some employ both, using one or the other for different kinds of ritual. Some may also use high-caste Karmācārya priests for secret Tantric rituals while many employ a lower-caste Karmācārya (Ghaṇṣū Ācāju), or a Vajrācārya, for purificatory death rituals.<sup>2</sup>

Claims to Śreṣṭha status, both one's own and others', are often hotly contested all round. Since there has been no Newar court for over two hundred years, there is no obvious authority which might adjudicate on the relative merits of one claim over another. In general, the post-1769 Parbatiyā regime has been indifferent to all but the most basic differences between Newar castes.<sup>3</sup> Where disputes about caste status have managed to reach the courts, their legal resolution has not automatically settled the matter for the Newars concerned.<sup>4</sup>

For Śreṣṭhas in particular, because they are a large and amorphous category, this introduces a certain degree of flexibility into the nature of their internal organization. Newars often say that nowadays anyone can call himself (or herself) a Śreṣṭha. Undoubtedly there are many who do this who would neither have dreamed of doing so as recently as a couple of generations ago nor would have got away with it in the public's estimation. But this does not mean that anything goes, nor that everyone who calls himself a Śreṣṭha is treated on an equal footing. Quite the contrary; internal discrimination and rivalry between different Śreṣṭha lineages ensure that order of a particular kind is maintained.

There are two main bases on which claims to Śreṣṭha status are advanced and which ensure that all order does not break down. The first is kinship (or genealogy): one is a Śreṣṭha because one is related to others who are Śreṣṭhas. The second is economic standing: one is a Śreṣṭha because one enjoys certain relations of patronage with members of other castes. However, there is nothing automatic about either kind of claim. Where some claim kinship, others deny it. Where some assert that their wealth demonstrates their high caste status, others say that this does not tell us anything about a person's ancestry and that the latter can be the only true criterion of caste membership.

It is often impossible to decide on the legitimacy of any particular claim. Indeed the whole question of legitimacy here is problematic and one must be very careful about making inflexible judgements, as Śreṣṭhas themselves are. The fact, already stated, is that if once there was a final authority on this matter, today there is none. Consequently there is no unambiguous scale of ranking on to which each household or lineage can be mapped—as the teams in a football league are.

This is often difficult for outside observers to grasp. In order to understand the social organization of other groups, outsiders, naturally enough, seek some kind of order. When they learn that such-and-such indigenous categories exist, they tend to pigeon-hole people in them, and to believe that because the categories are relatively unchanging, the composition of them is also relatively unchanging. Whether or not this kind of pigeon-holing can ever be applied successfully to any society, it cannot be applied to Śreṣṭhas because there is a certain amount of vagueness surrounding the boundaries between one Śreṣṭha category and another and between Śreṣṭhas as a whole and other castes. This allows some to claim that they are 'in fact' Śreṣṭhas or members of a particular Śreṣṭha status group while others insist that they are 'in fact' members of another group or another caste altogether.

Even to put it like this could still be misleading. It is not that such-and-such groups 'really' exist and are composed of such-and-such lineages. It is rather that every individual claims to belong to a particular household and lineage and, by virtue of this, to be a member of a particular status group. How this claim is accepted will not only depend on how particular individuals are able to portray themselves, but also on the claims of those they would ally themselves with. As often as not such claims are contentious, there being a general tendency to challenge those whose aspirations might compromise one's own status in any way.

## 2. *Types and Distribution of Śreṣṭhas*

I have chosen to introduce the Śreṣṭhas in this way not simply because it seems to me the most salient characteristic of their social organization, but also because others, including many Newars themselves, tend to perceive things rather differently. The typical conception is the kind of picture outlined by Colin Rosser in his very influential article, based on fieldwork in 1956–7, entitled 'Social Mobility in the Newar Caste System'. According to Rosser and, he claims, his Newar informants, there are five grades of Śreṣṭha respectively called by him Chathare (*chatharīya*)—literally 'six-clan'; Panchthare (*pāñctharīya*)—'five-clan'; Charthare (*cārtharīya*)—'four-clan'; Sarhetinthare (*sārhetintharīya*)—'three-and-a-half-clan' and 'Shrestha' (the inverted commas denoting the dubiousness of their claim to this caste status). Later ethnographers have, on the whole, uncritically accepted this list of discrete groupings in their own descriptions of Śreṣṭha social organization.

Rosser echoes traditional Newar wisdom in asserting that the *chatharīya* lineages are those descended from the aristocracy of the Malla dynasty (i.e. pre-1769).<sup>5</sup> This would appear to indicate that the *chatharīya* must be a fixed number of lineages since only those who can prove their genealogy back to this period have the right to this high Śreṣṭha status. Below the noble *chatharīya*

families, according to Rosser and popular opinion, come the *pāñcthariya* Śreṣṭhas. These are lineages which are not able to demonstrate aristocratic origins or who are believed to be the descendants of cross-caste unions between *chathariya* families and other, lower castes.

Next, he says, come the *cārthariya* and *sārhetinthariya*, the lower the number, the lower the status. Rosser points out that 'it is not at all clear to Newars themselves why these particular terms are used' (p. 102). He also points out that the use of the terms is not at all consistent. While the *chathariya* use this term 'commonly and openly to describe themselves' (ibid.) *pāñcthariya* is normally used in reference to others. Indeed when people use this latter referent towards themselves, this 'usually means that they actually belong to the grades lower than the Panchthare but are claiming this higher position' (ibid.).

As for *cārthariya* and *sārhetinthariya*, these terms are never used in self-reference since they are, of the essence, pejorative. And of the 'Shresthas' who come below the *sārhetinthariya* Rosser says that, given their doubtful origins, '[t]hey are barely distinguishable if at all from the topmost grade of Jyapus' (ibid.). To make matters more complicated still, there are other adjectives by which one can make fine (and sometimes not so fine) distinctions:

Collectively the lower grades of Shrestha... are derogatively referred to as *chipi*, *bagha*: *Sheshya* ('half-Shrestha') or *lawat* (literally, 'half-caste')—and sometimes equally derogatively with the prefix of a village name — e.g. 'Thimi Shresthas' or 'Thoka [Tokha] Shrestha'—with reference to the fact that many villagers migrating into the towns and bettering themselves economically take to calling themselves Shresthas. (Ibid.)

Since the claim of any particular family is often contested by other Śreṣṭhas, Rosser sought a more neutral arbiter in order to work out just how many families belonged to each of his categories. He consulted the family priests (*purohit*) of the lineages in question and asked them to allocate a rank to each household. He notes that the priests 'frequently disagreed amongst themselves in their judgements of status' (p. 101) and in such cases he took the majority opinion. The results of this inquiry for the city of Bhaktapur are shown in Table 3.1.

My own fieldwork among Newars carried out over a period of four years (1980–2 and 1984–6) would suggest that this kind of definitive quantification is inherently misleading for two main reasons. The first, which I have already drawn attention to, is that there is a great deal of subjectivity involved in all such claims. Taking the majority opinion eradicates the fuzziness which is an essential part of the structure. This fuzziness should not be seen as a peculiar idiosyncrasy of the Newar caste hierarchy. There is always a discrepancy in caste systems between the way in which people represent the ideal picture as fixed and the way in which these systems actually change over time. Two counter-opposed strategies are being played simultaneously and this introduces

TABLE 3.1. *Rosser's characterization of Śreṣṭhas in Bhaktapur*

Caste	Status grade	No. of households
SHRESTHA	A Chathare	437
	A/B doubtful A status	174
	B Panchthare	340
	C Charthare & Sarhethinthare	266
	D 'Shrestha'	155
Total		1,372

Source: Rosser (1966, 101, table 3).

a continual tension between stability and change. On the one hand, one wants to ensure that the status of one's own family and lineage is as high as possible; on the other, one wants to prevent others from manipulating their status to the detriment of one's own.

The second reason to be wary of an overly rigid quantification of Newar castes is that there is no such thing as a typical Newar settlement. At best one can identify a small number of types of settlement with particular kinds of caste configuration. I would specify four such types: (1) the old royal cities where the full spectrum of castes is found; (2) the satellites of these cities in the Kathmandu Valley—mainly, but not exclusively, farming villages; (3) long-established settlements outside the Valley which depend on both trade and farming; (4) recent, exclusively trading stations outside the Valley which have sprung up along the new roads.<sup>6</sup>

Śreṣṭhas are, uniquely, the only Newar group to be found in all of these four kinds of settlement but one must immediately be careful. As is now clear, Śreṣṭhas are a very wide grouping and the typical inhabitant of a hill bazaar is very different from the inhabitants of central Kathmandu or Lalitpur. The simplest way to illustrate the different characters of Newar settlements as far as Śreṣṭhas are concerned is to start with the most complex because it is from this that the very idea of 'Śreṣṭhahood' derives.

Essentially what 'Śreṣṭhahood' connotes is the concept of caste, and caste itself is a derivative of a particular kind of complex society—a kingdom, with all that this implies.<sup>7</sup> The traditional (i.e. pre-1769) Newar polities were hierarchical states, each with its own royal centre. These kingdoms were small, fragile, and in endless conflict with one other. The term *śreṣṭha* refers to the dominant lineages of these kingdoms.

The derivation of the word *śreṣṭha* is unsure. The following derivation was given to me orally by the late Thakur Lal Manandhar, formerly of the National Archives, Kathmandu, and author of the first Newari–English dictionary:

Originally the caste was known by another Sanskrit term—*śiṣṭa*—meaning noble or nobility. In Newari this became *śesta* and later *śeśyah*. There are references in the Gopāla Rāja Vaṃśāvalī (chronicle), written during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla in the

14th century, to the term *śyasta*. The same term is mentioned in a Newari translation of the Nārada Smṛti written during the same period. In this text it is mentioned that if a will is made in the presence of a *śyasta*, it becomes valid. The term later became re-Sanskritized, thereby subtly changing its meaning, to *śreṣṭha*.<sup>8</sup>

In Sanskrit the word *śreṣṭha* means simply 'the best, first quality'. However it is possible that its current usage in Nepali and Newari is derived from another Sanskrit word, *śreṣṭhin*, meaning 'member of a trading guild'. Many members of the Śreṣṭha caste are in fact traders. The indigenous Newari term *śyeśyo* (or *śyośyo* or *śyahśyah*) is often taken to be a direct equivalent of the word *śreṣṭha* but this is problematic. Whether or not these terms are strictly equivalent depends on whom one is talking to. People who are not Śreṣṭhas tend to equate the two terms using the Sanskrit-derived *śreṣṭha* in a honorific fashion and the indigenous *śyeśyo* in a non-honorific way. This dual form of reference is found for all other Newar castes: thus Śākya is the honorific form of Bare; Jyāpu is the non-honorific title for Maharjans and Dāgols.

Matters are not quite so simple for the referents *śreṣṭha* and *śyeśyo* because many Śreṣṭhas say there is a subtle distinction between the two. Roughly speaking, when such a distinction is made, *śyeśyo* is made to refer to a narrower and lower status group than the all-inclusive high-caste category of *śreṣṭha*. In this case *śyeśyo* might be said to be equivalent to *pāñchthariya śreṣṭha* while *śreṣṭha* also includes the aristocratic *chathariya* families. However, Newars are not unanimous on these usages. Levy reports that the terms '*śreṣṭha*' and '*sesya*:' [sic] 'are not used in Bhaktapur, where they are thought of as Kathmandu usages . . . Upper-level informants say that the term "Śreṣṭha" used elsewhere would probably apply only to the Chathariyā [sic]' (Levy 1990: 79). By contrast, Toffin, writing about Panauti, does not class the *chathariya* lineages among the Śreṣṭhas 'because the former refuse to be assimilated to the latter and because only they (along with the Brāhmaṇs) have the right to wear the sacred thread' (Toffin 1984: 383 n. 9).

If this seems confusing, it is because there is a certain amount of manipulation of language to suit one's case. The fact that one is dealing with two languages, each derived from an ethnic group which has its own conception of caste status and identity, makes this kind of manipulation possible. Because the Nepali-derived terms *chathariya*, *pāñchthariya*, and so on have no precise indigenous Newari equivalents themselves, this indicates that Newars are frequently adopting a scale of caste status which reflects power differentials in the modern state rather than in the earlier Newar kingdoms. This fact also largely explains why the term *śreṣṭha* has come into general circulation among Newars as well as other ethnic groups even though it is not an indigenous Newari category.

The differentiation of Śreṣṭhas along status lines has a long history:

From the beginning of the fifteenth century had emerged new families of courtiers picked up from the castes known as the Pradhānā Śreṣṭha which claimed to itself

dignity and status of the Kṣatriya clans.<sup>9</sup> Together with the Brāhmaṇa priests, the Rājopādhyāya, these families controlled key posts of the administration, and gained vested interest in the land by acquiring feudal rights over holdings. Sometime [*sic*] these made and unmade kings and ministers. (D. R. Regmi 1965: i. 658)

The term *chatharīya* derives from an attempt to demarcate the more powerful lineages, such as the Pradhāns and others associated with the old courts, from other high-caste Newars. There are, however, a number of fallacious stories in circulation offering alternative derivations. One popular view mentioned by Rosser is that *chatharīya* is a corruption of the Nepali *chetri* which is itself a corruption of the Sanskrit *kṣatriya*—the *varṇa* of kings and nobles. This explanation is extremely unlikely. Another common hypothesis is that the literal meaning of ‘six clans’ (Np. *cha* = six; *thar* = lineage, family) shows that there must have been an original six who, at one time or other, enjoyed a special exalted status. This is the opinion of many Newars today and is often believed to be the case by outside observers.

In fact there is no evidence for such a number, or indeed any finite number. Investigations as to which lineages constitute the *chatharīya* group always reveal a number greater than six and a welter of contradictions and opposing claims. Some people insist that a particular family has the right to be called *chatharīya* and that the family name ‘proves’ its aristocratic origins. A name such as Rājibhaṇḍārī (the royal storekeeper) is, it is sometimes claimed, sufficient evidence of noble pedigree. Anyone who believes that this is indeed the case need only talk to the Rājibhaṇḍārī themselves. Many are quick to point out that they do not all come from a common lineage and that only some are descended from the former functionaries of the Newar kings. The others, it is claimed, are outsiders who have sought high status by association—and there is no doubt that what is implied is that this is a higher status than is their due.

In other cases it will be conceded that such-and-such a family are descended from an ancient noble lineage but that they have become ‘degraded’ by marriage with a lower-caste group. In some cases the degradation can be by association: thus family A will claim that family B has lost status because B’s brother or uncle or some other close relative has married ‘unacceptably’. However, both the question of who is an acceptable marriage partner and the degree of relational proximity required to cause loss of status are subjects of interminable dispute.

All this means that virtually no family’s claims to pure *chatharīya* status are completely beyond suspicion. Whatever they may claim themselves, nearly every family has some skeleton in the cupboard. One Kathmandu family I knew well, and which had obviously seen more prosperous days, was fond of demonstrating its marriage alliances with other unimpeachable *chatharīya* families. In this way the family tried to shield its ever-increasing poverty with its claims to membership of the *ancien régime* and by distancing itself from other Śreṣṭhas

whose position derived merely from property ownership. The parallels with the attitudes of the old English landowning élite and the industrial and mercantile *nouveau riche* are all too obvious.

In spite of such strategies for both association and dissociation, it is widely believed that a small number of families are the 'true' *chathariya*. Family names which demonstrate an alliance with the old Newar courts are commonly cited as evidence of this. Thus, apart from Rājbhāṇḍārī (royal storekeeper), there are several lineages each of Malla (claiming descent from former kings), Pradhān (first minister), Amātya (minister), Joṣī (astrologer), Rāj Lawat (royal mixed caste), Rāj Vaṃśī (royal lineage), Māske, and so on.<sup>10</sup> This is further complicated by those taking the surname Śreṣṭha but who claim to be originally members of one of the aforementioned lineages.

The inclusion of the Mallas within this group is also contentious. Mallas are sometimes wont to point out that, as descendants of royalty, they should be distinguished from the mere nobility, the *chathariya* lineages. There is some evidence to suggest that some Malla families have, where possible, pursued marriage alliances with Newar Brāhmaṇs in order to underwrite this distinction.<sup>11</sup>

However, an alternative explanation of this practice is also sometimes proffered. Some *chathariya* claim that those calling themselves Malla today are not descended from the Malla kings but from an earlier dynasty sometimes referred to as *thaku juju* or, as they are referred to in the chronicles, as the *vaiśya thakuri*. Because they were considered *vaiśyas*, *chathariya* families would not marry with these self-designated Mallas. The latter therefore sought marriage partners among the Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs who were similarly small in numbers and had difficulty finding suitably high-status spouses. Such contradictory claims to caste status are common. What is seen as an indisputable genealogy from one point of view is seen as so much pretension from another.

As is already clear, there are more than six lineages which are referred to as *chathariya*, so why six? The idea of an original six families seems untenable though it has been suggested that the group known in Newari as the *khumha pradhān* (six first ministers) may provide the derivation (Gellner 1992: 350 n. 13). This refers to six powerful families in the old kingdom of Lalitpur who effectively reduced successive kings to the status of puppets in the pre-Gorkhālī regime.

A more likely explanation is that the term was coined by the victorious Gorkhālīs themselves. Eager to ascertain who was who among the Newars, they were especially keen to identify the aristocracy (from whom they plundered large areas of land). Among the Gorkhālīs was a group of six clans (the *tharghar*) who wielded great influence with the Shah (Śāha) kings—Pāṇḍe, Arjyāl, Panth, Rāṇā, Khanāl, and Boharā. This group is glossed as *cha thar* by the authoritative Nepali dictionary, *Nepālī Bṛhat Śabdakoś* (Pokharel *et al.* 1983: 618b), where it is explained that each clan sent one representative to meetings



of the king's council. Another meaning given for *tharghar* is simply 'a family respected as traditionally well born'.

In the same way, certain Newar families were seen to have a close connection with the Malla king and these are referred to in the 1854 Code as *tharghar ra asal śreṣṭh* (see Höfer 1979: 137). By referring to a group of Newars as *tharghar* or *chatharīya*, the new regime was identifying them as the most powerful and prestigious families they had to contend with, the equivalent of the Gorkhālī *cha thar*. Once applied, the label stuck and other Śreṣṭha families became known as *pāñc̣tharīya*—'five-clan'—which is to say 'inferior', 'not six-clan'.

In other words, the labels *chatharīya* and *pāñc̣tharīya* were used in the same way as one might in English say upper class and middle class. At any particular time, it would be relatively straightforward to assign any particular family to one or other class using certain generally agreed upon criteria. Over the course of a number of generations, however, the star of any particular household might rise or fall, and not necessarily in tandem with other households of the same lineage. A particular household might, for a number of reasons (including political subordination and confiscation of land), find its assets considerably reduced and thus less able to attract marriage partners of high standing. Or the reverse: through success in trade, or through winning political favour, a previously unconnected family might suddenly find itself the object of attention from members of the *ancien régime* anxious (consciously or unconsciously) to exchange their noble blood for economic security.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of all this in the present context is that the amount of status capable of being bartered in this way has been strictly limited for over two hundred years. With the overthrow of their kingdoms and their exclusion from the processes of political and military power, Newars have been obliged to assert themselves in different ways. The primary channels have been trade and administration, avenues made possible by the fact that the Newars have long experience in both fields. They have always been an urban people and substantial numbers have always been literate and used to the demands of both government and market.

The categories *chatharīya* and *pāñc̣tharīya* are, then, shifting rather than fixed. A family generally regarded as *pāñc̣tharīya* in one generation may, through skill or good fortune, be able to arrange a marriage alliance with a family generally regarded as *chatharīya* and so itself effect a claim to sharing in this status. Ironically, the *chatharīya* family may in the eyes of many be degraded to *pāñc̣tharīya* by the very same alliance. Everything will depend on what one has to lose or gain by association with, or dissociation from, either family.

But what of *cārtharīya* (four-clan) and *sārhetintharīya* (three-and-a-half-clan)? This brings us back to Rosser. Many Newars, including many Śreṣṭhas, talk as if *chatharīya* and *pāñc̣tharīya* were fixed groups even though this is not

actually the case. Rosser believed that the same applied to *cārthariya* and *sārhetinthariya*. He goes to considerable lengths to outline the process of mobility whereby a wealthy Jyāpu in the town seeks a marriage alliance with a down-at-heel Śreṣṭha family in one of the surrounding villages as a way of upgrading the status of his children and grandchildren and, indirectly, himself.<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt that this kind of covert mobility does in fact take place. What is in some doubt is the frequency with which it occurs and the nature of the groups between which it occurs. As Rosser points out, there is a marked difference in stereotype between the urbane, literate Śreṣṭha and the unkempt, illiterate Jyāpu peasants. Nevertheless he believes that the division is crossed with sufficient regularity 'to be a constant theme of discussion, and for numerous examples to be cited in conversation' (1966: 99).

According to Rosser, there are a number of steps in the Jyāpu's upward climb. The first is to abandon one's previous lineage name (which is nearly always an unambiguous marker of caste status) and to adopt the surname Śreṣṭha. The second is to imitate Śreṣṭha cultural behaviour. Principal here is the dropping of traditional Buddhist Vajrācārya family priests (*purohit*) and the adoption of Hindu Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs.

Next there is a general tightening up of behaviour in matters connected with Hindu ideas of purity and pollution. As Rosser notes, 'In the Newar system, it is the Shresthas who exhibit the keenest concern with caste rules, understandably because it is with them that the keenest competition for status occurs' (ibid. 96). The fourth step for the upwardly mobile Jyāpu is to quit his traditional *guthis* and seek admission to Śreṣṭha *guthis*, particularly the death (*sī* or *sanāḥ*) *guthis*. According to Rosser, the rich Jyāpu can bribe his way into a Śreṣṭha death *guthi* by offering a payment substantially in excess of the membership fee normally required for a new entrant.

Finally, and crucially, the aspirant Śreṣṭha must demonstrate his success by securing a marriage alliance within his new caste. The most common strategy, argues Rosser, is for a wealthy Jyāpu from the city, now using the surname Śreṣṭha and accepted by a Śreṣṭha death *guthi*, to go to the surrounding villages, find a poor Śreṣṭha family, and offer a marriage alliance with them. Failing this, he can marry with other social-climbing Jyāpus who are doing the same thing. In this way they create a new caste group—not accepted as being on the same level in the caste hierarchy as the city's 'real' Śreṣṭhas but distinguished from the Jyāpus they have traditionally married and in whose *guthis* they have traditionally belonged.

According to Rosser, this step-by-step strategy of mobility depends critically on the urban anonymity afforded by the larger Newar cities. The poor village Śreṣṭha is unable to verify the status claims of the rich city-dweller proposing a marriage alliance with his family. But since the proposer bears all the external marks of a city Śreṣṭha, the villager is all too eager to agree to an alliance.

My own investigations suggest that while there is indeed a great preoccupation among Śreṣṭhas with this kind of mobility, its actual incidence is very limited. The fact that there are many Jyāpus living in Kathmandu, with office jobs and an urban life-style, but retaining the lineage names Maharjan or Dāgol, indicates clearly that there is nothing automatic about the transition into the Śreṣṭha fold. Moreover there seems to be some doubt that status envy is as endemic among Maharjans as Rosser claims. Toffin and his colleagues report that there is a marked reluctance among Kathmandu Maharjans to consider marriage with Śreṣṭhas: 'However rich he may be, the Maharjan of Kathmandu takes pride in being a Farmer and displays a strong attachment to his caste. To become Srestha [*sic*] through an upward intercaste alliance is alien to his way of thinking' (Hollé *et al.* 1993: 36).

The primary reasons for limited mobility are found in the organization of caste, *guthi*, and kinship associations. Taking the death *guthi*s first, the ability to bribe one's way into these associations is by no means as easy as Rosser's analysis implies. There are two good reasons for this. First, there is little advantage for the existing *guthi* members in extorting an abnormally high entrance fee from a new member. In general, members are not able to draw on the financial resources of such *guthi*s. They do not function as banks or credit associations to guarantee the financial security of their members.<sup>13</sup> Rather, their central purpose is to ensure that funeral ceremonies are promptly and correctly carried out and to provide for an annual feast which demonstrates the solidarity of the group. As such, their only expenses are for the feast itself and for the materials needed for cremations; they do not require large deposits of capital.

The second difficulty in entering a Śreṣṭha *sī guthi* (or *sanāḥ guthi*) is that such associations are, along with the history of marriage alliances, one of the principal indices of caste status. As Rosser notes, Śreṣṭhas are very scrupulous about observing caste rules and to allow anyone with money into the *guthi* would defeat the whole purpose of their exclusiveness. To admit someone from another caste or whose origins were dubious would be to prejudice the status of all the members of the *guthi*. I know of no Śreṣṭha *guthi* which would take that risk, though of course it is unlikely that people would admit openly to such a practice.

As for marriage, marrying up into Śreṣṭha lineages and marrying with other upwardly aspirant Jyāpu families are two quite different things. I would argue that only the former amounts to true caste mobility and from my own extensive genealogical researches it appears to be both difficult and rare. The latter, on the other hand, which is more aptly described as a fragmentation of previously more homogeneous status groups, appears to be very common among Śreṣṭhas. One family or group of families will refuse to marry into lineages which it has previously married claiming that they are 'really' of higher status.

The baseline of Rosser's argument—urban anonymity—is impossible to defend. In the tightly structured world of the Kathmandu Valley it is very easy

to ascertain someone's origins. As Rosser observes, whenever a marriage is arranged through a *lami* (broker), as is usual when one's own kin and friends fail to produce a suitable spouse, the first question the *lami* asks is: 'Which *guthis* does the prospective spouse's family belong to?' For someone who has traditionally resided in the Valley, it is almost always possible to ascertain ancestry and *guthi* affiliation relatively quickly. In those cases where it is not possible, there is extreme reluctance to negotiate a marriage, failure to elucidate origins being construed as a sign that the family under investigation must have something to hide.

The reasons for such reluctance are obvious. A compromising marriage reflects not only on the individuals concerned but on their entire families. If one member of a family contracts a marriage which is disapproved of, then this may make it very difficult for the other members to make alliances with the groups who have traditionally consented to be their marriage partners.

The essential question then becomes: who exactly comprise the group which is able to exert pressure on individuals to conform, and to impose sanctions when they do not? It is not simply a question of disapproval; the disapproval must be strong enough to bite, to prevent people from breaking the rules rather than simply admonish them for doing so. For the smaller Newar castes in the Kathmandu Valley this question is relatively easy to answer—in general all the members of a caste in a particular locality. Just how extensive that locality will be is subject to variation but for an area as small as the Kathmandu Valley, it is theoretically possible for all the members of smaller castes to meet periodically and discuss any transgressions of caste rules—and some actually do.

For groups such as Maharjan and Śreṣṭha this kind of collective enterprise is impossible for two reasons. In the first place, the numbers involved are too large for this to be practical and in the second place these are not unitary castes in the way that, for example, the Rājopādhyāya or Citrakārs are (see Chs. 6 and 8). Both Maharjans and Śreṣṭhas comprise very large numbers of families and, as is clear from the accounts in this chapter and others (see Chs. 4, 5, and 10), there is great heterogeneity of status among them.

Is it then possible to offer a general model of how sanctions are maintained among Śreṣṭhas if they are such a variety of groupings? Do the same rules apply equally to all—to those who are believed to be connected by blood or marriage to the old aristocratic families; to those who have no such connection but are clearly distinguished from lower castes, especially Maharjans; and to those whose origins are either dubious or all too clearly tainted by association with other castes?

In my opinion it is possible to present such a general model though no doubt it has to be modified here and there, from settlement to settlement, or between one status group and another. To do this we need to look carefully at the organization of caste and *guthi*, both of which are founded on kinship. The stark logic of this organization is, I believe, best demonstrated in a settlement like the

small market town of Dhulikhel (where I carried out extensive research from 1980 to 1982), but the underlying principle is exactly the same as for a complex city such as Kathmandu, Lalitpur, or Bhaktapur.

### 3. *Social Cohesion in Dhulikhel*

In Dhulikhel, which lies about ten kilometres outside the eastern rim of the Valley, one does not find the kind of differentiation between different grades of Śreṣṭha which is characteristic of the Valley's three cities. In Dhulikhel one either belongs to the acceptable marriage circle of local Śreṣṭhas or one does not. There is no ambiguity and no room for manipulation. So what defines the criteria of acceptability and how are they maintained? The simplest answer to this question is, I believe, affiliation to the *guthi* associations.<sup>14</sup> These associations are found throughout Newar society and serve a variety of purposes. In Dhulikhel two associations are of paramount importance: the *dyaḥ pūjā guthi* which brings together the lineage for worship of the ancestral deity, and the *sī guthi* which, as was seen earlier, groups together a number of families to ensure that death ritual is properly carried out.

#### 3.1. The *dyaḥ pūjā guthi*<sup>15</sup>

The Śreṣṭhas of Dhulikhel are divided into fifty-one named exogamous patrilineages. This is complicated by the fact that four of these lineages split over a caste dispute in 1955 and now recognize certain ties of kinship (they do not marry within the original lineage) but not others (they no longer observe death pollution for those from whom they have split). While the reasons for the split are themselves revealing, I will ignore this for the time being and discuss the main way in which the lineage manifests its unity—in the guise of the *dyaḥ pūjā guthi*.

The *dyaḥ pūjā guthi* is named after a ritual which most Newars perform annually and regard as being of the utmost importance. The ritual is called *digu dyaḥ pūjā*, often abbreviated to *dyaḥ pūjā*. Not entirely inappropriately, *dyaḥ pūjā* has sometimes been called a kind of ancestor worship (Nepali 1965: 194). More accurately it is the worship of a god or gods who symbolize the idea of common ancestry. Those who worship in common always belong to an agnatic kin group (though often they are unable to identify their founding ancestors). These lineages normally have a name or nickname by which they are commonly referred to: Mākaju (Mr Monkey), Dhōju (Mr Jackal), Cochēju (Mr High-House), and so on.

Which gods are being worshipped during *digu dyaḥ pūjā* is a subject of some confusion. More often than not my Dhulikhel informants were unable to say; often they could not even agree on how many gods were being worshipped.

Usually they would say that *digu dyah* means *kul devatā*, the Nepali term for lineage deity. According to K. B. Bista's excellent study of *kul devatā* among the Chetris of the Kathmandu Valley, a cult which seems to owe much to contact with the Valley's Newar population:

The term Kuldevatā means 'the god or gods worshipped by the lineage' or 'the gods whom the ancestors used to worship' . . . The principal aim of worshipping Kuldevatā is to avoid diseases and epidemics, acquire wealth and achieve success . . . (Bista 1972: 6)

Strictly speaking, the *dyah pūjā* group (the lineage) is not always referred to as a *guthi* but this question of terminological usage is secondary to the fact that the main characteristics of the group are similar to those of other *guthis*. The most striking characteristics are: the rotation of responsibilities among constituent members, the holding of an annual worship and feast, and the obligation felt by members to perform those duties which the *guthi* demands.

In Dhulikhel it is the norm that all households in a lineage will perform *digu dyah pūjā* together. To do so separately would be to proclaim that one has split from one's lineage relatives (*dāju-kijā*). This ritual takes place once a year but though it is only once, its importance should not be underestimated. This is the main occasion for the exogamous lineage to demonstrate its unity to the outside world.

The only occasions when a household may not perform *digu dyah pūjā* are when its members are in a state of ritual pollution. Most commonly this results from the birth or death of a relative. The whole lineage is barred from this worship for one year if the lineage head (*nāyah*) dies, for six months if the seniormost female member of the lineage (*nakī*) dies, and for thirteen days on the death of any other adult member of the lineage.

Each year one member is given the responsibility for overseeing the ritual. This person is known as the *pāhlāḥmha* (he whose turn it is). The *pūjā* begins with a procession from his house which is led by the most senior member of the lineage (*nāyah*). Ideally the procession contains at least the heads of all the households in the lineage though a son or younger brother may represent someone who is away on business or who is too ill to attend. Normally women and older unmarried girls do not take part in the procession though young men and children of both sexes may.

It is a grave insult for a household not to send someone to the *digu dyah pūjā*. The most severe sanction against such a household would be to refrain from observing death pollution should a member of that household die. Effectively this would imply excommunication from the lineage. Those who have moved away and do not return for the *pūjā* are regarded as being no longer in the lineage. Those who work outside but whose main residence is in Dhulikhel are always careful to honour this commitment, even if they have to travel considerable distances to do so.



PLATE 5. Before the twelve-day confinement ritual called *bārḥā tayegu*, young Dhulikhel Śreṣṭha girls receive blessings from the most senior woman of their lineage (the *thakāli nakī*). (D. Quigley)

Normally the *nāyaḥ* carries a brass vessel, called a *kwataḥ*, which manifests the unity of the *digu pūjā* group. The representatives of other households carry various offerings to the gods and they all contribute to the purchase of a pure black goat which is sacrificed. The head and tail of the goat are divided into seven pieces (*śī*) which are shared out among the seven most senior men of the lineage.<sup>16</sup>

Later a feast is held to which only lineage members are invited. *Guthi* feasts are in contrast to other feasts where the rules governing who may eat together are more relaxed than for ordinary everyday food. Normally for daily food, which contains boiled rice, only family members eat together. For most feasts, friends and neighbours, sometimes belonging to other castes, will also be invited. For the *guthi* feasts, however, outsiders are strictly prohibited.

### 3.2. The *sī guthi*

The fifty-one Śreṣṭha lineages of Dhulikhel are divided into ten *sī guthis* comprising as few as three and as many as ten lineages. Generally all the households of a lineage will belong to the same *sī guthi*. However, there is no absolute rule about this and in fact the four lineages which have split each have households in two different *sī guthis*.



Normally membership passes from father to son. Only the household head may be a member of the *guthi*. If brothers separate, all except the eldest must apply for membership in their own right and there is a small joining fee of 10–20 rupees. Unless there is some exceptional reason, they will always be admitted. It is said that a Śreṣṭha coming to live in the town could join one of these *guthis* if he had lived there for at least ten years and could prove his caste status. However there is no case of this having happened in living memory.

As a rule, co-*guthiyārs* (*guthi* members) live in very close proximity to one another. This results first from the fact that households of the same lineage are generally neighbours since partition is effected, wherever possible, by physically dividing a house, or building another one close by. The rationale behind grouping together neighbouring lineages in the *sī guthi* is one of expediency. The main function of this *guthi* is the performance of funerary rituals and these should always be carried out as quickly as possible after a death has occurred. *Guthiyārs* must therefore be informed immediately since they are obliged to attend the funeral procession and cremation of all household members of fellow *guthiyārs*.

This obligation to attend all funerals is sanctioned in the first place by fines for non-attendance and ultimately, if there are repeated absences, by expulsion from the *guthi*. Once expelled, a household can rely on no one to take away their



PLATE 6. A cremation ceremony for a Dhulikhel Śreṣṭha attended by men of the lineage and fellow *sī guthi* members. In the foreground on the other side of the river two members of the Dyahlā caste wait to take away the funeral shroud. (D. Quigley)



dead. There is no Śreṣṭha family in Dhulikhel which has taken the risk of this happening.

As with Hindus everywhere, death in Dhulikhel is marked by an abundance of ritual. Given that *sī guthi* membership is compulsory, it is curious that *guthiyārs* have a very minimal role to play in this ritual. *Guthi* members who are not of the same lineage as the deceased do not observe any death pollution nor do they have to shave their heads as male lineage members do. Once the cremation is complete, their role is finished. They play no part in the elaborate post-funerary ritual and need not be invited to the feast held by the deceased person's household thirteen days after the death. Nor do they participate in the purification ceremony (*chē bēkegu*) which is held immediately after the feast. *Guthiyārs* also have no role to play in the annual festival of Sā Pāru (Np. Gāī Jātrā) where the year's dead are commemorated in a procession through the town.

The only other obligation for *sī guthiyārs* is to attend the annual *sī guthi* feast; this is a strictly private affair and others are prevented even from watching the proceedings by erecting screens. Just before the feast, the annual dues, including any fines payable for non-attendance at funerals, are collected. Apart from providing for the feast itself, this money will be used for other items which the *guthi* requires: cooking utensils, shrouds, *pūjā* materials, and so on. Occasionally small loans may be made to *guthi* members at low interest. However, it is quite possible for one member to be almost destitute and for his fellow *guthiyārs* to feel no responsibility for his well-being.

In general, financial matters are always the responsibility of the individual household and never of a wider grouping. *Guthi* funds are never used to pay for funeral expenses; these must be borne by the household itself. Similarly, Dhulikhel's *sī guthis* employ no ritual specialists. Priests and musicians who are required at different times for death rituals are paid by the dead person's household. When a Dhulikhel trader dies while outside the town, the *guthiyārs* have no duties to perform. Friends and neighbours will cremate the body in the place of the death.

To conclude this section on Dhulikhel's *guthis*, one has to say that what is most striking is the coercive nature of membership. Those who move away and do not return to honour their obligations to the *sī guthi* and *dyah pūjā guthi* are soon forgotten. This applies even to the closest bonds of kinship. A brother who repeatedly defaults on his obligations will no longer be considered a brother and even those among his closest kin who have stayed behind will no longer consider themselves bound to observe pollution should he, or his wife and children, die.

It is as if kinship is only acknowledged through common participation in ritual. It is not enough to have an *idea* of kinship; it must be demonstrated, repeatedly and publicly. To forgo one's obligations immediately provokes a sanction: at first fines, ultimately excommunication from the lineage and

thereby from the caste. That the more drastic measures are not often taken does not mean that it is difficult to do so. They are rare because the alternative of being casteless is something most people cannot contemplate. The simple reason this option cannot be contemplated is that to be casteless means to be without potential marriage partners. This may not be an immediate problem for those who are already married but they would jeopardize the future of their children if they did not continue to conform to the demands of lineage and *guthi*.

For historical reasons, the Śreṣṭhas of Dhulikhel are a very marginal group who are not accepted as status equals by the Śreṣṭhas of the Kathmandu Valley (Quigley 1984). Even Śreṣṭhas in nearby settlements such as Banepa and Panauti refuse to marry them because, they say, Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas do not observe the normal rules of Newar society. As evidence, it is sometimes claimed that Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas practise cross-cousin marriage, which is normally regarded as taboo among Newars. In fact, it is also outlawed in Dhulikhel, something which I frequently pointed out to Śreṣṭhas elsewhere. This had little effect on their overall opinion of Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas, who, they steadfastly maintained, were of lower caste status.

Shunned in this way, Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas have had little option but to turn in on themselves. In self-justification of their social isolation they claim that they will only marry other Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas because it is only they whose status they can be absolutely sure of. They can be certain of the claims of their neighbours because even if they are not individually related to all of them, they will have affinal relations with other lineages who are connected to the proposed spouse through *guthi* membership. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Quigley 1986: 84), the actual figures for the geographical spread of Dhulikhel marriages are remarkable. In a survey of 550 marriages contracted by two Dhulikhel Śreṣṭha lineages over four generations, 93.3 per cent were with partners who belonged to other Dhulikhel Śreṣṭha lineages, to Śreṣṭha lineages in the villages immediately surrounding the town, or to groups in other settlements whose descent from Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas was generally acknowledged. As far as I could tell, all of the remaining 6.7 per cent (37 marriages) were made by people who had left Dhulikhel with little or no intention of returning. The majority of such marriages involve children of traders who have been long established in their respective bazaars, and most are a long way from Dhulikhel.

It can be seen that the *guthis* are not simply for occasional rituals; they provide an unambiguous marker of caste status and thereby indicate who are acceptable marriage partners and who are not. When exactly Dhulikhel's marriage circle was closed is not known, but by marrying only among themselves, Dhulikhel's Śreṣṭhas have been able to justify their status claims to their own satisfaction. They have not, however, satisfied others. Indeed the way they are viewed by Śreṣṭhas in other settlements shows that they are caught both

ways: if they marry strangers, they are breaking caste rules; if they marry endogamously, they must be a caste apart.

#### 4. *The Śreṣṭhas of Kathmandu*

##### 4.1. Marriage patterns among Śreṣṭhas in Kathmandu

During the year of 1985 I undertook a survey of exactly 100 Śreṣṭha households in the city of Kathmandu. I would not claim that this provides a representative sample of the Śreṣṭhas living in the capital. While my research took me all over the city, and while I interviewed people from a variety of walks of life, Śreṣṭhas make up such a large and diverse conglomerate that one could never be sure that any survey provided adequate coverage of the entire range. Some of my research was concentrated in one particular area of the old city (Jhochē near the Durbar Square) where there was a large concentration of Śreṣṭha households, mostly said to be of *pāñcthariya* status. I also interviewed a number of people from households which were widely held to belong to *chathariya* lineages, and attempted to follow out some of the chains of marriage alliances. Finally, I interviewed a number of Śreṣṭhas who traced their descent from settlements other than Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur and who were regarded by *chathariya* and *pāñcthariya* Kathmandu families as falling outside the range of acceptable affines. In nearly every case they had arrived in the capital within the last generation or two and none belonged to a Kathmandu Śreṣṭha *guthi*.

For reasons already alluded to, the figures which I have compiled from this survey should be treated with caution. Sometimes a respondent would identify his household as being of *chathariya* status while others in the neighbourhood would cast aspersions on this claim. Common objections included the facts that:

- one of the household members had married 'out of caste' and had thereby compromised the caste status of all the members of the household;
- the household did not belong to any *guthi* and therefore caste status could not be ascertained;
- the origin of the household was not known.

Nevertheless, regarding the households which had lived in Kathmandu for generations, there was fairly widespread agreement that they should be ascribed either *chathariya* or *pāñcthariya* status if one ignored the occasional misdemeanour such as an uncharacteristic 'bad' marriage, or a recent lapse in *guthi* obligations. Of the 100 households in my survey, 32 were widely said to merit *chathariya* status, 56 were commonly described as *pāñcthariya*, and 12 were referred to as some kind of 'other' Śreṣṭha. In fact, the ascription *pāñcthariya* sometimes provoked a certain amount of unease. Some households claiming this status were said (usually by respondents who referred to them-

selves as *pāñcthariya*) to be 'neither *chathariya* nor *pāñcthariya*, simply Śreṣṭha'. In saying this, the respondent was effectively stating that his own family would never marry into theirs and that there was therefore a clear difference of caste status between them. Since his own family was *pāñcthariya*, theirs must be something else.

Since it is impossible to resolve the problem of whose word should be taken as final, I have reached my own conclusions in such cases. The reader may consider that this appears to follow the same procedure as Rosser about which I expressed certain misgivings. There are two differences in my approach however. First, the reader is warned that any figures should be regarded as a guide rather than as definitive. Secondly, I have not compounded the problem by creating falsely essentialist groupings such as *cārthariya* and *sāṛhetinthariya* which are in reality *ad hoc* pejorative labels.

The genealogies which I took from my 100 survey households yielded a total of 1,014 marriages over three generations. I cannot be confident that every respondent accurately reported every marriage that had taken place in his family; in fact I can be fairly confident that a number of marriages were concealed because they were not approved of and were thought to pull down the status of all the immediate agnatic relatives.

The figures are given in Table 3.2 and reveal a number of interesting patterns. In general, as one might expect, *chathariya* households are rather more restrictive in their marriage alliances than *pāñcthariya* families. 87.6 per cent of *chathariya* brides marrying out go to families which are generally accepted as either *chathariya* or *pāñcthariya* while 87.1 per cent of women marrying into *chathariya* households come from these two groups of lineages. The figures are somewhat less for the *pāñcthariya* households though the underlying pattern of careful marriage alliances is still clear. 69.5 per cent of *pāñcthariya* women marrying out go to *chathariya* or *pāñcthariya* Śreṣṭha families while 71.5 per cent of women marrying into *pāñcthariya* households come from these two groups. The corollary of this is that *pāñcthariya* households are more ready to enter into marriage alliances with 'other Śreṣṭhas' and non-Śreṣṭhas. If one looks at the marriages involving *chathariya* brides, it can be seen that less than half of those marrying out (46.9%) go to other *chathariya* families. On the other hand, more than half of the women marrying into *chathariya* households (55.8%) come from other *chathariya* families. This undoubtedly reflects a greater concern with the status, and potential for causing pollution, of women coming into the household compared with those who are 'lost' to other families.<sup>17</sup> The figures for the twelve 'other-Śreṣṭha' households are also interesting. Eighty-two per cent of women marrying out from such households have succeeded in being accepted into old-established Śreṣṭha families in Kathmandu. By far the majority have married into *pāñcthariya* households, but twenty-five cases of such women marrying into *chathariya* families were also recorded. This is admittedly a relatively small sample, but if the same pattern is repeated

throughout the Śreṣṭha population, it represents a significant 'infiltration' from outside.

The geographical spread of Śreṣṭha marriages is also interesting. Out of a total of 137 women marrying out from the thirty-two *chatharīya* households of my survey, 44 (or 32.1%) moved to households outside Kathmandu. Similarly, of the 203 women marrying into these *chatharīya* households, 76 (37.4%) came from households outside Kathmandu. For marriages involving the fifty-six *pāñctharīya* households of my survey, there is a similar pattern. Out of a total of 215 of these *pāñctharīya* women who married out, 74 (34.4%) moved to households outside Kathmandu. Of the 349 women marrying into these *pāñctharīya* households, 125 (35.8%) came from households outside Kathmandu.<sup>18</sup>

What this indicates clearly is that marriages among Kathmandu Śreṣṭhas involve a considerable degree of geographical mobility. Women did not only move to, and come from, other Newar settlements in the Valley. Alliances were also arranged with Newars in towns as far away as Biratnagar and even Darjeeling. This is, of course, in striking contrast not only to the Śreṣṭhas of Dhulikhel, but also to a number of the other groups described in this book.

#### 4.2. Lineage, *guthi*, and other trends in Kathmandu

The kind of very exclusive, tightly organized society found in Dhulikhel is less marked for Śreṣṭhas in many other Newar settlements. Among Kathmandu Śreṣṭhas the *guthi* system is often said to be verging on collapse. While this is

TABLE 3.2. *Marriage statistics of Śreṣṭhas in Kathmandu*

	<i>Chatharīya</i>	<i>Pāñctharīya</i>	Other Śreṣṭha	Non-Śreṣṭha	Total
1. Women marrying out of <i>chatharīya</i> households into households classed as:					
Number	76	66	16	4	162
Percentage	46.9	40.7	9.9	2.5	100
2. Women marrying into <i>chatharīya</i> households from households classed as:					
Number	121	68	25	3	217
Percentage	55.8	31.3	11.5	1.4	100
3. Women marrying out of <i>pāñctharīya</i> households into households classed as:					
Number	68	151	82	14	315
Percentage	21.6	47.9	26.0	4.5	100
4. Women marrying into <i>pāñctharīya</i> households from households classed as:					
Number	66	225	89	27	407
Percentage	16.2	55.3	21.9	6.6	100
5. Women marrying out of 'other-Śreṣṭha' households into households classed as:					
Number	25	89	20	5	139
Percentage	18.0	64.0	14.4	3.6	100
6. Women marrying into 'other-Śreṣṭha' households from households classed as:					
Number	16	56	46	2	120
Percentage	13.3	46.7	38.3	1.7	100

not quite true, there has been a noticeable change in attitudes towards *guthi* obligations; when exactly this dates from is difficult to say but it seems to be a fairly recent phenomenon and there is little doubt that increasing modernization, bringing with it a massive increase in cash incomes and spatial mobility, has contributed greatly to the change. The *guthi* system depends firstly on a fixity and proximity of residence. This is particularly so for the *sī guthis*, which have to be neighbourhood groups because their constituent members need to assemble quickly: cremations always take place with the absolute minimum of delay.

Many people told me that nowadays, where people have moved out of the city to the suburbs, it is common to contact them by phone to inform them that their presence is required. Be that as it may, the fact is that once people have put any distance between themselves and their fellow *guthi*-members, they become increasingly reluctant to attend to their traditional duties.

Distance is only one reason for this. In many cases people are simply too busy working to be able to afford the time involved. The fact that they will have to pay a fine for each absence is rarely sufficient incentive to attend, except for the very poorest families. In general, fines have not kept up with inflation and are now a small price to pay for avoiding one's traditional obligations. Those who have decided to leave the organization for good, will, of course, simply ignore the fines, a factor which further contributes to the *guthi*'s demise. All *guthis* require financial support and historically fines have been one of the major methods of swelling the coffers.

In Kathmandu I was told repeatedly that *guthi* membership is no longer as binding as it once was, or as binding as it is still regarded in Dhulikhel. This applies even to those who would regard themselves as traditionalists and it seems to reflect a growing individualism in the city. On the other hand, the actual figures indicate that *guthi* membership is still very widespread. Out of the 32 *chathariya* households in my survey, only 5 (15.6%) reported not being attached to any death *guthi*. Out of the 56 *pāñcthariya* households, 12 (21.4%) stated that they did not belong to a death *guthi*. And of the 12 'other Śreṣṭhas', only 2 (16.7%) were not members of a death *guthi*. Interestingly, in this latter category, of the ten households reporting *guthi* membership, only three had joined Kathmandu *guthis*; the remaining seven belonged to death *guthis* in their settlement of origin.

Over half the *chathariya* households (17, or 53.1%) reported that only *chathariya* families would be admitted to their death *guthis*. Ten *chathariya* households (31.3%) stated that their *guthis* were made up of Śreṣṭhas of different grades.

In Kathmandu there appears to be a growing reluctance to submit to the corporate demands of the *guthi* and a greater ability to cope with family deaths from one's own household resources. In Dhulikhel, it will be remembered, *guthi* affiliation is not simply a means of coping with the material demands

brought about by a death. More importantly, it is the primary marker of caste and kinship membership. How, then, do changing attitudes to *guthi* affiliation affect more general patterns of kinship and marriage in the capital? The short answer is that it is too early to say. The move to the suburbs by many Kathmandu and Lalitpur families has only really begun to gather momentum in the last twenty years or so. Many families claim that while their *guthis* are still functioning, they are not quite as solid as they used to be, and the general prognosis is that as suburbanization snowballs, *guthis* will be less and less able to fulfil their traditional functions.

Proximity of residence is less crucial for the *dyah pūjā* (or *digu pūjā*) groups than for the funeral associations since the obligation to meet comes only once a year. In fact this obligation can be dispensed with altogether provided that the constituent households continue to worship the lineage deity during a prescribed period (which comes before the rice-transplanting season). The *dyah pūjā* group is simply a way of formally indicating who are patrilineal kin and thereby owe certain obligations to each other: for example, to observe set periods of mourning after a death.

In my sample, 20 out of 32 *chathariya* households (i.e. 62.5%) claimed that they no longer observed *dyah pūjā* with their agnatic kin (*phuki*). The figure was even more pronounced for the *pāñcthariya* households: 40 out of 56 households (71.4%) said they observed *dyah pūjā* with other household members only. Interestingly, nine out of the twelve 'other Śreṣṭha' households (75%) said they did still perform *dyah pūjā* with their agnatic kin, a fact which seems to indicate that settlements other than Kathmandu are still quite traditional in this regard.

While the *guthis* and *dyah pūjā* groups of Kathmandu Śreṣṭhas appear to be on the wane, there is still a strong sense of caste among them. It does not require a very long memory to be able to identify those groups of families whom one has traditionally been allowed to marry and those groups who have been prohibited. While there is increasing dispute about who should be classified as *chathariya* or *pāñcthariya*, the underlying idea that one should, as far as possible, marry status equals is still deeply engrained. The criteria of acceptability for marriage partners may be more flexible than they were a generation or two ago, but they are not infinitely flexible: as the figures show, most Śreṣṭhas continue to marry other Śreṣṭhas.

Two other trends are worth remarking on. Śreṣṭhas are often said to be the Newar group which is least committed to the Newari language. The general perception is that Śreṣṭhas are upwardly mobile, and in terms of local politics, business, and other employment opportunities, this usually requires being as fluent in Nepali as the Parbatiyā population. The actual figures for language spoken in the home among Śreṣṭhas are interesting. Of the 100 households in my survey, only 6 reported using Nepali exclusively while a further 28 said they spoke both Nepali and Newari at home. In such cases, Nepali was typically

spoken to children while the adults spoke Newari among themselves. It may be significant that a higher proportion of *chathariya* households use Nepali (12 out of 32, or 37.5%) as against 15 out of 56 *pāñcthariya* households (26.8%).

In spite of the changes which Śreṣṭhas report, virtually all retain one crucial feature of their traditional social organization. With the exception of one *pāñcthariya* household, all of those in my survey said that they maintained a hereditary relationship with a family priest (*purohit*) and the great majority (87%) said they also maintained traditional relationships with other castes such as Barbers (Nāpit) and Ācāju funeral priests. All but four of the *chathariya* households and all but two of the *pāñcthariya* households retained a Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇ. Three *chathariya* households employed a Vajrācārya, and one a Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇ. Only two *pāñcthariya* households in my survey reported employing a Vajrācārya priest. I am rather suspicious of this latter figure and suspect that some respondents told me that their *purohit* was a Rājopādhyāya because they believed it was more prestigious to retain a Hindu family priest rather than a Buddhist.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, four out of the twelve 'other Śreṣṭha' households said that their traditional *purohit* was a Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇ, a fact which reflects the difficulty of finding Newar Brāhmaṇs outside the Kathmandu Valley. At this point it would be useful to make some other observations about Śreṣṭhas living outside the Kathmandu Valley.

## 5. Diaspora Śreṣṭhas

By 'diaspora' I want to refer to those Newar settlements which have been established outside the cultural homeland of the Kathmandu Valley. From earlier research on some of these settlements a number of commentators made certain conclusions for the whole of Newar society which now seem rather shaky. The erroneous conclusion which has gained most widespread currency is that Newars do not really have caste in the way that exists in India. This notion was first put forward by Fürer-Haimendorf in two articles written in the late 1950s:

Ideally all Newar castes are endogamous, but whereas in India the rigid endogamy of castes and sub-castes is an immutable and essential feature of the Hindu social system, caste endogamy is not strictly observed among the Newars and there is customary provision for inter-caste unions. (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 245)

According to Haimendorf, this flexibility was most in evidence among the Śreṣṭha (Sheshyo) caste:

The endeavour of every Sheshyo is to rise in status and this can be achieved by marrying a girl of a grade superior to his own . . . (The principle operates between castes and) instances are known of Jyapus marrying Sheshyo girls of 'Grade



Four', and obtaining thereby Sheshyo status for their children. (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 34)

This, of course, is the thesis which Rosser was to pursue in greater detail later and which I have challenged at the beginning of this chapter.

Much of the evidence for Haimendorf's thesis did not, however, come from the Kathmandu Valley at all but from the diaspora Newar settlements. The best documented of these is Dailekh in the western hills, given the pseudonym 'Belaspur bazaar' by Lionel Caplan. Caplan points out that most Newars in this town refer to themselves as Śreṣṭha even though there is evidence to show that their emigrant ancestors came from lower castes:

Early administration records support the statement of some informants that most who remained to settle were from a number of low and economically depressed Newar castes, such as Nau (potters), Kau (blacksmiths) and Bada (coppersmiths), who in Kathmandu Valley would normally not have married one with another nor enjoyed commensal relations.<sup>20</sup> But local demographic considerations resulted in a not too great concern for such rules among the immigrant settlers in Belaspur. This led to the obliteration of distinctions between these groups and their common self-identification as 'Shrestha'. (L. Caplan 1975: 25)

How were these lower castes able to get away with their higher-status pretensions? A number of factors seem to be responsible. Both Caplan and Fürer-Haimendorf point out that many hill Newars have abandoned those institutions which, in the Valley, gave them their cultural distinctiveness. They speak Nepali rather than Newari and they no longer practise rituals such as *ihī* (child marriage to a deity) which are peculiar to Newars. Indeed they have 'adopted the marriage, funerary and other ritual practices of the hill people (*pahāṛe* [i.e. Parbatiyā]) of twice-born status' (Caplan 1975: 26), and they 'tend to lose any consciousness of the clan names their ancestors must have had' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1962: 27).

There is, of course, a certain advantage in this absent-mindedness as to lineage identity. As Caplan showed, Belaspur Śreṣṭhas were really from lower castes and the same is probably also the case for many hill bazaars where Newars predominate. Whatever one's original caste, the adoption of the name Śreṣṭha (or often Pradhān—one of the noble Śreṣṭha lineages) has made precise status identification difficult and produced a greater fluidity in marriage alliances.

But it is precisely the remoteness of the hill towns which makes this fluidity possible. Difficulties of communication meant that until very recently (with the improvement of road transport) anyone could call himself Śreṣṭha and expect to get away with it. Since many Śreṣṭhas had traditionally been traders, it was perfectly natural that an incoming merchant should claim that status. As always, however, one must be careful about generalizations. Some of the hill bazaars which were not so remote (e.g. Pokhara, Gorkha, Bandipur, Tansen,

and Dolakha) contain large, multi-caste Newar communities where the original caste affiliation of Valley emigrant ancestors is often remembered.

In the smaller, less accessible, settlements, people tended to accept incomers' self-identification not because they automatically believed it, but because acceptable marriage partners in the locality were few and far between. This shortage of Newar spouses in the more remote areas of the hills forced a situation where family pedigrees were investigated with rather less zeal than would have been the case at home. Alliances which would have been unacceptable in the Valley were readily tolerated in the bazaars where the alternative of marrying non-Newars was even less palatable.

In more recent times a crucial factor adding to the fluidity of caste barriers in many of the bazaars is that they lack social stability. This is particularly so in those settlements which are predominantly inhabited by traders who move from town to town in pursuit of the optimal profit. Mobility of this kind means that these communities often lack the institutions which, in the Kathmandu Valley, make anonymity impossible and produce the intense sense of cohesion which never fails to impress outsiders.

In many of the diaspora settlements, the absence of *guthis* in particular makes it difficult to enforce sanctions pertaining to caste rules. This is particularly true of those bazaars which have sprung up along new roads such as that which runs east from Lamosango, a small trading station on the Arniko Highway connecting Kathmandu with the Tibetan border. The Newar shopkeepers in these bazaars, who are mostly Śreṣṭhas, feel no loyalty to their temporary places of residence. Most frequently they will have extended families in or near the Valley where they will return periodically, and especially for rites of passage and the more important calendrical rituals, to demonstrate where they truly belong.

In a way, then, Rosser's argument should be inverted. It is not the cities of the Kathmandu Valley which provide anonymity but the small rural bazaars. It is not size of settlement which is the crucial variable in identifying prospective marriage partners but the degree to which public rituals and institutions like *guthi* are (or have been in the recent past) entrenched. Even in a city the size of Bhaktapur, it is rarely difficult to ascertain someone's lineage identity because all castes are represented in various calendrical rituals and *guthis* where their status is repeatedly made public to everyone. Someone who cannot be readily identified *ipso facto* must not belong to the social universe of the town and must therefore fall outside the range of acceptable marriage partners.

## 6. Conclusion

In certain respects, for example with regard to caste, there is reason to believe that Newar society became more rigid after the Gorkhālī conquest in the

second half of the eighteenth century. This is due in large measure to the policies of the Ranas and their efforts to secure a unified Hindu state:

The Ranas utilized the ideology of caste to validate and reinforce their own political authority and to ensure the political stability of an absolute and autocratic despotism . . . This determined Hinduism had the effect of notably raising the prestige (and of course the tangible rewards) of the Hindu Newars in particular the Shrestha merchants and of depressing the status of Newar Buddhism particularly the Gubhaju [i.e. Vajrācārya] priests. These Gubhaju family priests found themselves increasingly deserted by their *jajmans* for their more favoured and influential Brahman competitors. (Rosser 1966: 82)

The Muluki Ain was the main expression of Rana policy. Essentially it was a charter for the political legitimation of the new Gorkhāli regime which imbued caste ideology and practice with the force of a uniform national law and backed this up with a system of lawcourts. B. L. Joshi and L. E. Rose write (1966: 12) that the several modifications of this code during the Rana period were 'always in the direction of increased orthodoxy'.<sup>21</sup>

Among the Newars, Śreṣṭha families were privileged in that some among them secured access to the highest echelons of government after the Gorkhāli conquest of the Valley, a fact which has had social reverberations down to the present day:

During the Rana period, government positions were monopolised by some two hundred 'client families'—mostly Kathmandu-based Brahmans and Ksatriyas but with a few Newari Shresthas included. These three high-caste groups still provide 80–90 per cent of the bureaucracy. (L. E. Rose and M. W. Fisher 1970: 70)

The Hindu Newar, and it is the Śreṣṭhas who are the most self-consciously Hindu, are making a status claim by identifying themselves with the politically dominant. Recent modernization has done little to diminish the heightened caste consciousness which was produced in the Rana years. On the contrary, the increasing number of claims to Śreṣṭha status is one index that caste is alive and well in Newar society.

### Notes

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1. See e.g. Toffin's chapter on the Rājopādhyāya in this book.
2. See Gellner (1992: 60–1) for a discussion of this multiplicity of religious specialists and its association with *śivamārgī* rather than *buddhamārgī* patrons; cf. p. 211 below. Toffin (1987: 218 ff.) describes the duties of fourteen classes of ritual specialist, each from a different caste, who are required 'in the case of the death of a person belonging to a dominant caste'.
3. See the discussion of the Muluki Ain below.
4. See Rosser (1966) for an interesting and very contentious example of how the Ranas dealt with caste disputes among the Newars. Greenwold (1981: 94–101) disputes Rosser's interpretation and the issue is taken up again by Gellner (1992: 237–8) and Lewis, pp. 61–2 above.
5. See G. S. Nepali (1965: 155) for a similar view.
6. See Gellner (1986: 107–13) and Ishii in Ch. 4 below for alternative typologies of Newar settlements.
7. On the connection between caste and kingship, see Ch. 10 below.
8. Manandhar's dictionary entry (1986: 2696) reads as follows: 'śesyah sesyaa, n. a caste name among the Newars, more commonly known as Shrestha (< ON [i.e. Old Newari] sista, a king's man < Skt. one's own man, cf. śrestha, Skt. śreṣṭha, the best).' See D. V. Vajracharya and K. P. Malla (1985: 130) for a reference to the poisoning of Haricandadeva in NS 448 (1328 CE) by the *śiṣṭa*—glossed by the editors as 'Śreṣṭha or courtiers'.
9. More likely these families were known simply as Pradhān—i.e. 'first minister'. The use of the name Śreṣṭha as a self-referent is not widely attested before the end of the eighteenth century.
10. For examples of lists of reputedly *chathariya* lineages see G. S. Nepali (1965: 159), Gutschow and Kölver (1975: 56), and Levy (1990: 625).
11. See K. P. Malla (1980).
12. Generally in this book we have preferred the honorific title Maharjan to the non-honorific Jyāpu. I have retained the latter title in this discussion of Rosser both to be as faithful as possible to his argument and to underscore the difference in stereotype between Jyāpus (popularly glossed as 'those who can do manual work'—i.e. farmers) and the Śreṣṭhas, who wield the pen rather than the hoe.
13. In this sense they are unlike the *sanāḥguthi* of the Citrakārs, described by Toffin in Ch. 8 below as a 'charitable institution'.
14. The word *gu* is sometimes used in place of *guthi*.
15. In an earlier article (1985b), I have referred to this group as the *deo pūjā guṭhi*.
16. See Toffin (1976) for an explanation of the symbolism involved.
17. As one *chathariya* Śreṣṭha man wittily put it to me: '*khe chagah tahjyā sā, tahjyāta*' (literally, 'if one egg is broken, so be it'). By this he meant that if a daughter who

marries out goes to a lower-caste family, this is her problem; her choice does not compromise her uterine kin. Other people would not necessarily agree with this sentiment, but each case would be considered individually and much would depend both on the status of the household being married into and the vested interest of anyone making a judgement.

18. These figures are similar to those reported by Gellner from his small sample of Śreṣṭhas in Lalitpur, 38% of whom married brides from outside the city (Gellner 1992: 310).
19. On this question, see especially Gellner (1992: 55–7). Gellner writes that large numbers of Śreṣṭhas, both in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, have Vajrācārya priests and continues: ‘Inscriptions show that, before the present dynasty established its rule in the Kathmandu Valley in 1769, Śreṣṭhas made numerous donations to Buddhist monasteries, established *caityas* (Buddhist cult objects), and fed monks (i.e. Vajrācāryas and Śākya), as well as establishing Hindu temples and cults’ (ibid. 56).
20. Nau is actually the Newar Barber caste (Nāpit) while Bada (Bāḍā) are Śākya and/or Vajrācāryas and are more often goldsmiths than coppersmiths.
21. A list of the different editions of the Muluki Ain can be found in M. C. Regmi (1978*b*, vol. iv); see Höfer (1979) for a thorough analysis of the rulings on caste in the original 1854 edition.

# Caste and Kinship in a Newar Village

*Hiroshi Ishii*

## 1. Introduction

Since the studies of Fürer-Haimendorf (1956), Nepali (1965), and Rosser (1966), it is well known that the fundamental elements of Newar society are caste, socio-religious organizations called *guthi* based on a system of rotation, patrilineal kinship, and the joint family. It is further characterized by the coexistence of Hinduism and Buddhism, and by the importance of residence, seniority, and a high degree of conformity (including that towards caste ideology). Though tolerance of inter-caste marriages and consequent upward mobility are emphasized by Fürer-Haimendorf (1956: 33–6) and Rosser (1966: 90–104), a serious doubt has been raised as to their general applicability by Quigley (1986; forthcoming; Ch. 3 above).

Since 1970 the number of scholars dealing with Newar culture and society has increased and more intensive and comparative studies have appeared. To start with, I only take up Toffin's and Quigley's works. Other scholars' works will be referred to in later sections when necessary.

Toffin's monumental work of 1984 dealing with Pyangaon, Panauti, Theco, and other places, aims at being comprehensive. For him, Newar society is characterized by the importance of territory (town, village), the fact that the caste system does not determine all aspects of life, and the centrality of (political) power. He also emphasizes the penetration of religion into all layers of society (Toffin 1984: 593–6). For Toffin, the rural–urban dichotomy is crucial. Stating that the structure of Pyangaon society is based on kinship and that of Panauti on the caste system (*ibid.* 586), he concludes that the caste system does not embrace all Newar local communities (in contrast with India) and only organizes those communities in the centre which are more Indianized, leaving those on the fringes with a different logic (of kinship) (*ibid.* 592).

Studying Dhulikhel, Quigley (contrary to Toffin) maintains that the hierarchical ideology of caste is pervasive among the Newars (Quigley 1984: 319; 1987: 167). 'It is my belief that the *guthi* system, like the networks of kinship and marriage alliances, is essentially structured by the ideology of caste

hierarchy' (Quigley 1984: 290). He thinks that the fundamental basis of Newar social organization is found in local kin ties, and that caste status and marriage alliances are closely entwined with this conception of local identity (*ibid.* 286). Above all, the notion of an 'introverted holistic community' (*ibid.* 316–17) as the ideal for Newar society and the importance of territoriality combined with local endogamy (*ibid.* 310–11; Quigley 1987: 166) occupy a very important place in his discussion.

The main points of disagreement between scholars of Newar society concern inter-caste marriages and the role of caste. On the other hand, all observers agree on the importance of kinship and the social role of territoriality combined with local endogamy. But the following discussion clearly shows that the hitherto accepted notion of Newar local endogamy requires considerable modification.

In this paper, by means of an analysis of inter-caste relations, marriage, affinal relations, and patrilineal kinship in a Newar village, I discuss the caste system in a rural setting, the absence of upward social mobility, the importance and endurance of marital and affinal ties, the broad extension of village social ties (in terms of marriage and inter-caste services), and the small size of the most important intra-caste ritual (as well as kinship) units. In the analysis of patrilineal kinship in the village, the equivocality of indigenous social concepts will be dealt with along with the crucial role of rituals in social organization. In conclusion, a tripartite typology of Newar settlements will be proposed instead of Toffin's dichotomy.

The village studied, Satungal,<sup>1</sup> is situated about three kilometres west of Kirtipur. Similar to other Newar villages, it is a compact settlement with rows of brick houses of three to four storeys. Despite its comparatively small size for a Newar settlement (1,121 and 1,550 residents in 1970 and 1984 respectively), Satungal is a multi-caste village where Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans outnumber other castes. This makes it different from some of the villages inhabited predominantly by one caste (for example, the Maharjan population amounts to 99.5% in Khokna and 99.8% in Pyangaon; in Dhulikhel 91% of the Newars are Śreṣṭhas).<sup>2</sup>

Table 4.1 shows the main castes<sup>3</sup> of the village and their household numbers in 1970 and 1984. The description below concerns mainly Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans though other castes will be dealt with when necessary.

## 2. *Inter-Caste Relations*

Here I will give a brief account of inter-caste relationships in this village without attempting to carry out any comparison with other localities. I hope this is enough to show that the caste system is an essential element in the social structure of this village.

TABLE 4.1. *Numbers of households by caste in Satungal in 1970 and 1984 (excluding temporary residents)*

Castes (non-honorific names in parentheses)	Years	
	1970	1984
Brāhmaṇ (Barmhu)	1	1
Śreṣṭha (Syesyah)	63	90
Maharjan (Jyāpu)	100	133
Putuwār (Duī)	10	9
Nakarmī (Kau)	1	1
Mānandhar (Sāymi)	1	1
Khaḍgī (Nāy)	17	18
Kāpālī (Jugi)	1	1
Total	194	254

## 2.1. Commensality

People in Satungal cannot take special kinds of foods from castes lower than their own. In this respect, all foods are divided into the following three categories:

- (1) boiled rice, lentil soup (*kē*; Np. *dāl*), and jellied buffalo meat (*taḥkhāḥ*; Np. *thalthale*);<sup>4</sup>
- (2) other cooked foods and water;
- (3) raw foods.

Foods in category (1) cannot be accepted from any castes lower than one's own while raw foods (category (3)) can be accepted from all castes. Foods in category (2) cannot be given by unclean castes (*lah calay majupī* or people from whom water cannot be accepted (*calay* = 'to circulate')) to clean castes (*lah calay jupī* or people from whom water can be accepted).

Commensal relations between the castes of Satungal can be summarized as in Fig. 4.1.<sup>5</sup> The criterion of commensality helps to determine the caste hierarchy: Brāhmaṇ at the top followed by Śreṣṭha and Maharjan in this order; Kāpālī at the bottom; and Putuwār, Nakarmī, and Mānandhar being of the same status in the middle rank. Khaḍgī and Kāpālī are regarded as unclean castes. As is seen in other caste societies, different castes sit in separate rows when they eat together at feasts or in the field during busy agricultural seasons. Without exception, foods from categories (2) and (3) only are served on these occasions.

## 2.2. Other attributional and interactional caste differences

Śreṣṭha houses are situated in such a way that they intersect the village from north-west to south-east. Maharjan houses are separated into east and west groups and Khaḍgī houses are found at the south-west end of the village. This



Castes	Br	Śr	Mh	Pt	Nk	Mn	Kh	Kp
Brāhmaṇ	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Śreṣṭha	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□
Maharjan	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□
Putuwār	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□
Nakarmī	■	■	■	□	■	□	□	□
Mānandhar	■	■	■	□	■	■	□	□
Khaḍgī	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	□
Kāpālī	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	■

FIG. 4.1. Commensal relations between castes in Satungal

- Key ■ The castes in the left-hand column accept category (1) foods from the castes in the top row.  
 □ Castes on the left accept only Category (2) food from castes in the top row.  
 □ No cooked food can be received from castes in the top row.  
 ■ In the case of the Khaḍgī caste, *taḥkhāḥ* can be received from the castes from whose hands they cannot receive other foods of category (1).

arrangement not only symbolizes the hierarchy and the separation of castes but is deeply related to people's daily activities. Women particularly tend to get together more with neighbours of their own caste in such daily chores as the drying of crops, washing, and so on.

Lower-caste people are restricted from entering specific floors of higher castes' houses. For example, in the Śreṣṭha house, castes lower than the Śreṣṭhas cannot enter the topmost floor (kitchen) and impure castes can only enter up to the *māiā* (the floor above the ground floor).

Food restrictions and the rule regarding the sacred thread, well known in other caste societies, can also be observed. No caste here eats beef. Pork is eaten only by unclean castes. It is prohibited for the Brāhmaṇs to drink alcohol or eat meat except goat, sheep, and duck. They do not eat eggs (except duck eggs) or such vegetables as garlic and mushrooms. Other castes do not observe such restrictions. Most of the clean castes wear their sacred thread on the wrist but the Brāhmaṇs and a section of the Śreṣṭhas called Jośī wear it on the shoulder. Unclean castes are not allowed to wear any sacred thread.

Śreṣṭhas tend to insist on their difference from the Maharjans even in terms of trifling customs. For example, Śreṣṭha women never wear the black saree with a red hem commonly worn by Maharjan and Putuwār women (see Plate 10). Śreṣṭhas claim that they sit or squat on low wooden stands (*kwapu*) when they eat whereas Maharjans use straw mats; in fact Śreṣṭhas sometimes use straw mats also. One sometimes hears Śreṣṭha women expressing their surprise that Maharjan women use very heavy pestles (*lusi*), in this way implying the latter's rustic character.

Śreṣṭhas not only occupy a key position in the execution of festivals but are also more particular than other castes in Satungal about restrictions in rituals. For example, they abstain from eating rice and bean soup for three days during the Viṣṇudevī festival (the biggest village festival here) whereas the Maharjans and other lower castes abstain for one day only.

Kāpālīs are known to be different from all other castes because they do not cremate the dead but bury them. Khaḍgīs cremate their dead but have their cremation site at a place lower than that of higher castes.

In Newari, there are honorific expressions in verbs and personal pronouns differentiating (a) those who are equal to or lower than Ego, (b) those who are higher than Ego, and (c) those who are very high compared to Ego. Generally it is said that these correspond to (a) people of lower castes and people of the same caste who are of the same age or younger than Ego, (b) people of higher



PLATE 7. The men of Satungal (all castes from Śreṣṭha to Khaḍgī), many fortified by alcohol, carry the palanquin of the village's tutelary goddess, Viṣṇudevī, during her annual festival (eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Mangsīr, equivalent to early December). (*H. Ishii*)

castes and older people of the same caste, and (c) Brāhmaṇ and Vajrācārya (Gubhāju) and gods (including people possessed by a god). In practice, however, young people who are friends tend not to use honorifics to each other even though they belong to different castes and one commonly hears people using ordinary honorific expression (b) to Brāhmaṇs.

### 2.3. Inter-caste division of roles

As there is no place for a lengthy description of inter-caste services, I list the representative roles of each caste in Table 4.2, which also shows the castes who receive the services. As shown in the table, there is a complex giving and taking of services in festivals, rituals, and feasts. Among the caste-specific roles in this village only that of the Blacksmith (Nakarmī) can be called 'secular'. The roles of Nāpit (Nau, Barbers), who come from outside include both secular and ritual aspects and other castes' roles are concentrated on the religious and ritual side. In this way, the organization of the inter-caste services in this society can be said to be highly ritually orientated.

Table 4.2 also shows the dominant position of the Śreṣṭhas; they conduct important festivals and receive many services from various castes. It is not the Brāhmaṇ but the Śreṣṭhas who occupy the central position even in ritual matters of the village. The Śreṣṭhas have also been dominant in the political and economic spheres (see Ishii 1980, 1986).

Satungal is not self-sufficient in terms of caste-specific services as people have to invite several castes from outside. All the Vajrācāryas, and most of the Nāpits, Karamjits (Bhāḥs), and Dyahlās (Pwaḥ) come from Kirtipur; and some other castes come from other villages. However, only the Brāhmaṇ goes out to other villages to conduct his caste-specific services.

Though not stated in detail in Table 4.2, a system of enduring relations and fixed payments comparable to the *jajmānī* system in India can be observed in the work of priests, barbers, and blacksmiths. There has been much discussion of the *jajmānī* system since the study by Wiser, who characterized the system as a reciprocal one comprising mutual inter-caste service relations (Wiser 1988: xxii, 106). Some emphasize its integrative aspect (Opler and Singh 1950: 496 *et al.*). Some claim the system to be exploitative or coercive (O. Lewis 1958: 79; Beidelman 1959: 33; Berreman 1962: 391). In contrast, there are scholars who put more emphasis on its religious aspects (Gould 1964: 40; Dumont 1980: 92–108) and those who analyse it as a system of gifts or prestations (Ishwaran 1966: 138–54; Raheja 1988a: 248–54). Moreover, there are scholars who assert that *jajmānī* relationships neither constitute a true system nor are universal in South Asia; and they suggest that the term '*jajmānī* system' should be discarded (Good 1982: 31–8; Fuller 1989: 34–41, 52–5). These are put forward as differences in interpretation but they may also be due to the different times and places in which studies were carried out, a point which has so far attracted only



a little attention. To overcome this difficulty, it is necessary to build on comparative studies such as those of Kano (1977: 154–68) and Fuller (1989: 33–63) taking into account various forms of inter-caste service relationships such as the Maharashtrian '*balute (baluta)*' relationships in which officials and servants are attached to the village (Fukazawa 1972a: 260–348; 1972b). However, in this paper, because of limitations of space, I refrain from extensive discussion of these questions and leave a detailed analysis with full materials and comparison to another occasion.

What should be noted here concerning the Newar inter-caste service relations is that there are many castes whose service relationships are different from the ordinary *jajmānī* type. Thus it is not only households that receive services but also *guthis*, kin groups, and the village as a whole. The units which give services are either households or maximal lineages. There are many ways to pay priests and service castes; the main ones are fixed seasonal payments in kind, usufruct of *guthi* land, cash payments, and invitations to feasts. The inclusion of *guthis* and other groups in this system contrasts with the conventional picture of *jajmānī* relations, which are said to occur between families or households of different castes (O. Lewis 1958: 56; Beidelman 1959: 6). An analysis of the relevant *guthis* is needed for the elaboration of this point, but this also will be reserved for other papers. (I list only the 'service-receiving caste(s)' in the right-hand side column of Table 4.2. Many *guthis* whose members usually belong to the same caste receive caste-specific services.)

In short, Newar inter-caste service relations involve multiple social layers and are therefore significantly different from those common in north India. Though there are services related to the whole village, they are but minor and the village itself does not appear as a strongly integrated unit in this respect. This, together with the inclusion of *guthis* and other groups in such relationships, means that the system in Satungal also differs from south Indian systems characterized by *balute* and other relations. As a whole, the Newar system has many aspects which differ from the inter-caste service relationships of other South Asian regions to my present knowledge.

## 2.4. Inter-caste 'marriage'

No inter-caste marriage with a formal ceremony and feast is remembered to have occurred in this village. But several inter-caste unions are said to have taken place and persisted. As for hypogamous marriage and upward mobility (or anagamy), there have been 'marriages' between a Maharjan man of this village and a Śreṣṭha woman from outside and between a Putuwār man of the village and a Śreṣṭha woman of a nearby town. There occurred no upward mobility in these cases as the wives were absorbed by their husbands' castes and their children inherited their fathers' caste status.

TABLE 4.2. *The inter-caste division of labour in Satungal*

Caste	Stereotyped caste occupation (in quotation marks) and actual caste roles	Service-receiving caste(s) etc.
Brāhmaṇ (Barmhu)	<p>‘Hindu priest’</p> <p>(1) to conduct worship in life-cycle rituals, <i>śrāddha</i>,<sup>a</sup> Satya Nārāyaṇ <i>pūjā</i> (worship) etc.;</p> <p>(2) to conduct <i>pūjā</i> in calendrical rituals and festivals (mainly for <i>guthis</i>);</p> <p>(3) to give sacred thread;</p> <p>(4) to read sacred books during <i>caturmāsya</i><sup>b</sup></p>	<p>(1), (2) mainly Śreṣṭha, partly other clean castes,</p> <p>(3) clean castes,</p> <p>(4) whole village.</p>
Śreṣṭha (Syesyah)	(The dominant caste in this village) to conduct main festivals as village elders <sup>c</sup>	own caste, village in general
Maharjan (Jyāpu)	<p>‘Agricultural caste’, but their roles are:</p> <p>(1) to support Śreṣṭha elders in calendrical festivals;</p> <p>(2) messengers, bearers, and attendants in life-cycle rituals, feasts, and festivals;</p> <p>(3) midwives;</p> <p>[(4) cremation caretakers (<i>gmā</i>)];<sup>d</sup></p> <p>[(5) players of music<sup>e</sup> in main festivals, funerals, and weddings]</p>	Śreṣṭha
Putuwār (Duī)	<p>(Farmers and manufacturers of grain products)</p> <p>(1) messengers, bearers, and attendants in life-cycle rituals, feasts, and festivals;</p> <p>(2) midwives</p>	Śreṣṭha
Nakarmī (Kau)	‘Blacksmith’ following his caste-specific occupation	all castes
Mānandhar (Sāymi)	‘Oil-Presser caste’ with no caste-specific role in this village (shopkeeper)	
Khaḍgī (Nāy)	<p>‘Butcher caste’</p> <p>(1) to supply meat;</p> <p>(2) to sacrifice buffaloes in main festivals;</p> <p>(3) to usher festival and funeral processions with music;</p> <p>(4) to carry bride in the wedding procession;</p> <p>(5) to cut umbilical cord (women’s role);</p> <p>(6) to put away polluted things at childbirth and at death;</p> <p>(7) messengers of the village</p>	<p>(1)–(5) mainly Śreṣṭha and Maharjan</p> <p>(6) whole village</p>
Kāpālī (Jugi)	<p>‘Tailor cum musician caste’</p> <p>(1) to usher processions of important festivals with music;</p> <p>(2) to carry <i>sinha</i> (auspicious red powder) in the Viṣṇudevī festival;</p> <p>(3) to receive foods in certain rituals</p>	<p>(1), (2) whole village</p> <p>(3) clean castes</p>
<i>Caste (from outside)</i>		
Vajracārya (Gubhāju)	<p>‘Buddhist priest’</p> <p>(1) to conduct worship in life-cycle rituals, post-mortuary rites, and <i>śrāddha</i>;<sup>a</sup></p> <p>(2) to perform worship in a small number of calendrical rituals</p>	<p>(1), (2) mainly Maharjan and other clean castes, some Śreṣṭha</p>
Pahādī (Pai)	(1) to attend and guard deities, to walk with a sword in the procession and support Jyāpu elders in the Viṣṇudevī festival;	whole village

TABLE 4.2. *Continued*

Caste	Stereotyped caste occupation (in quotation marks) and actual caste roles	Service-receiving caste(s) etc.
	(2) to support Jyāpu elders in Mohanī (Dasaī); (3) to receive and dispose of offerings on the Sithi Nakhah day in May–June.	
Nāpit (Nau)	‘Barber’ to cut hair and nails and shave (1) in daily life; (2) in life-cycle rituals including post-mortuary rites	(1), (2) clean castes
Taṇḍukār (Khusah)	called ‘Nāy Gubhāju’ and conduct life-cycle rituals and post-mortuary rites including <i>śrāddha</i> <sup>a</sup>	Khaḍgī
Karamjit (Bhāh)	(1) to receive offerings in a few post-mortuary rituals	Śreṣṭha
Dyaḥlā (Pwah)	‘Fisherman cum caretaker in sacred places’ (1) to dispose of offerings to deities in important festivals	whole village
Damāī	‘Tailor’ (one of the Parbatiyā castes) (1) to repair and make clothes	all castes

<sup>a</sup> Worship of the dead with offerings of food (rice flour balls), flowers, etc.

<sup>b</sup> ‘Four months’ devotion period during the rainy season.

<sup>c</sup> For details see Ishii (1978).

<sup>d</sup> Roles in square brackets: roles which are no longer performed.

<sup>e</sup> This function was partially resumed some years later.

There are also cases in which certain people are said to be the descendants of men who had inter-caste unions with women of lower castes. The three cases I collected were between Śreṣṭha men and Maharjan or Putuwār women. They took place in the generations of the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of the present household heads. In all three cases, the descendants are regarded as either Maharjan or Putuwār. There was no case in which children of such a marriage were given a status in between that of the father and the mother though it is said that this can take place if the child does not take cooked rice from the hand of his lower-status mother. In such a case the child is called *lawā*.<sup>6</sup> A man can keep his status if he does not accept boiled rice from the hand of his wife of inferior status (but cannot if the wife is of an unclean caste). There was a case of a Śreṣṭha who lived with a Khaḍgī woman and voluntarily left the village to go to live in a town. Villagers said that he fell to the status of his wife.

In conclusion, I could find no instance of inter-caste upward mobility in Satungal, though there were both hypergamous and hypogamous unions.

### 3. *Some Aspects of Newar Marriage Practices*

Many authors assert that, contrary to orthodox Hindu ways, Newar marriage is characterized by all or some of such practices as elopement, divorce, widow remarriage, anagamy, and territorial endogamy (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 33–

8; Nepali 1965: 198–9, 417–19; Rosser 1966: 90–104; B. Pradhan 1981: 54–75, 201–2; Vergati 1982: 271; M. R. Allen 1987: 97–8). It is also commonly asserted that the first three practices are related to the ritual of *ihī* (mock marriage or girls' initiation) which is often claimed to make actual marriages secondary, not so sacred, and dissoluble. However, as we see below, the general applicability of these claims should be questioned.

Quigley maintains that in practice Newars are isogamous, that remarriage of women and divorce are infrequent and condemned among Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas (Quigley 1986: 76, 85), and that the most popular type of marriage in Dhulikhel is *swayambar* (*svayamvara*), which accompanies a particular kind of ceremony, though he adds that he was told that until twenty or so years ago the most common type of marriage arrangement was *khuyā bihā* ('thief marriage') (Quigley 1984: 253). Gellner asserts that marriage is a sacred tie for the Newars and a Newar woman is not so free to terminate her marriage as is usually claimed; he agrees with Quigley that widow remarriage is rare and highly disapproved of when the woman is middle-aged or old (Gellner 1991: 116–19; 1992: 204). On the other hand, R. P. Pradhan maintains the view that Newar women are never 'widows' (because of *ihī*), that they can divorce at will, and can contract hypergamous and anagamous marriages (R. P. Pradhan 1986: 149–50).

We have already seen that isogamy is the norm in Satungal. In the following, I will show that elopement and divorce are not so prevalent but the frequency of widow remarriage is considerable. I will also argue that the notion of Newar territorial endogamy should be greatly revised.

### 3.1. Marriage types and their degree of prevalence

Typologies of Newar marriage have been made by various authors (Nepali 1965: 230; B. Pradhan 1981: 58–64; Toffin 1984: 412; Quigley 1984: 253; Löwdin 1986: 50, 60, 152; R. P. Pradhan 1986: 153). Most of them give an elaborate or traditional type (*nyāphāku*,<sup>7</sup> *pañca bāja*,<sup>8</sup> etc.) as one end of a spectrum and elopement as the other, and they put one or two simplified types and/or innovations in between. Among the latter, *svayamvara* is most frequently mentioned though its connotation differs from one case to another.<sup>9</sup>

It is common to observe in the description of rural Newars that their marriage is extremely simple (Toffin 1984: 142) or that elopement is the most frequent form of marriage (Nepali 1965: 230; B. Pradhan 1981: 63). As for urban and other commercial settlements (except for Dhulikhel mentioned above), it is not clear which marriage type is popular, though it has been usual for scholars to describe and analyse elaborate marriage rituals (Bajracharya 1959: 418 ff.; T. T. Lewis 1984: 281–95; R. P. Pradhan 1986: 148–79; R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 12 ff.).

In Satungal the following three types of marriage are distinguished.

1. *bājā thānā hayegu* (literally 'to bring [the bride] by playing music'): a ceremonial wedding in which a marriage procession with music and big feasts are indispensable along with rituals held both on the groom's and on the bride's sides. It is common that a ritual of *svayamvara* conducted by a Brāhmaṇ in which the bride circumambulates and garlands the groom is included as part of these rituals.

2. *surukka hayegu* ('to bring [the bride] silently'): a simplified marriage lacking music and big feasts but solemnized by a ritual of *svayamvara* conducted by a priest. A go-between (*lami*) may or may not be present.

3. *payanā wanegu* ('elopement'): a man and woman begin to live together without informing their parents. In many cases parents give consent to their marriage and let the couple perform the ritual of giving betel nuts (*gway biyegu*) to close agnates and married-out daughters of the groom's household. After this they are regarded as married. If the boy's parents do not agree to let the girl live in their house, she usually returns to her parents' house and does not come back.

It is said that the difference between the above types is merely the expense involved and that this does not produce any difference in the status of women and children. When asked about the frequency of each type, people generally answer that the first type is the most popular, the second type comes next, and *payanā wanegu* the least popular. Table 4.3 shows the frequency of the appearance of the above three marriage types calculated out of 369 cases of marriages of all the castes in Satungal (including second and subsequent marriages). These figures support the locals' claim that *payanā wanegu* is not popular in Satungal. It is also noteworthy that Khadgīs do not celebrate marriages of type 1.

### 3.2. Divorce and remarriage

Divorce and remarriage are frequent and not stigmatized in Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 120–1) and Bulu (B. Pradhan 1981: 68–75), but they are rare and stigmatized in Dhulikhel (Quigley 1984: 253, 260) and among the Kathmandu Tulādhars (T. T. Lewis 1984: 296). Panga (Nepali 1965: 239–51) and Sunakothi (Löwdin 1986: 66) seem to fall in between the above two types though there are ambiguities in the data. However, Nepali thinks that divorce and remarriage are customary privileges of the Newars (Nepali 1965: 250). According to Löwdin, 'it was difficult to obtain any data on divorces, as they are infrequent and regarded as somewhat stigmatizing' in Sunakothi.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Divorce*

In Satungal, some people answered that there had not been a case of divorce when I asked in a very general way. Some said that a couple should continue to live together even though they kept on quarrelling. According to others, it may





PLATE 8. The betrothal ritual of *gway biyegu* in which the *lami* and the wife of the senior elder of the lineage adorn the bride with earrings (*mundri*); she is already wearing new clothes and shawl and has a *sinha* spot on the forehead. In this case the bride was a 17-year-old Śreṣṭha girl being given in marriage to the village of Lubhu. (H. Ishii)

happen that a woman leaves her marital house if she is not treated or fed properly but that she will be condemned if she leaves to live with another man without any such reasons.

During my fieldwork in this village, which was conducted several times intermittently from 1970, I could collect only ten cases of 'divorce' of Satungal men (many of whom remarried) and six cases in which girls who married out from Satungal in recent years had left their husbands. Five of these six have remarried. (I have not asked all the women in the village whether or not they have experienced 'divorce'.) Among the ten cases mentioned above, four are Maharjan cases, four Śreṣṭha, one Brāhmaṇ, and one Putuwār. The percentage of the married male population within each caste who have ever experienced 'divorce' as of 1984 (for which I have basic population data for all households)

TABLE 4.3. *Marriage types and their frequency by caste (as represented by figures of existing marriages collected in 1989)*

Castes	Marriage types		
	Type 1 bājā thānā hayegu	Type 2 surukka hayegu	Type 3 payanā wanegu
Brāhmaṇ	2 (100%)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Śreṣṭha	81 (63%)	36 (30%)	12 (7%)
Maharjan	110 (57%)	74 (39%)	8 (4%)
Putuwār	5 (36%)	8 (57%)	1 (7%)
Nakarmī	0 (0)	2 (100%)	0 (0)
Mānandhar	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0)
Khaḍgī	0 (0)	28 (100%)	0 (0)
Kāpālī	—	—	—
All castes	199 (54%)	149 (40%)	21 (6%)

are as follows: Maharjan: 2.3; Śreṣṭha: 3.4; Brāhmaṇ: 100; Putuwār: 7.7; other castes: 0; total male population: 3.0.

Satungal people distinguish between *pārpācuke* (in which a written paper is given to the woman being divorced) and other forms of *de facto* 'divorce' (desertion, elopement of either spouse, a case of a wife staying in her natal home for about ten years, etc.), but I have included both cases in the above enumeration. The *pārpācuke* cases are less than half of the listed figures.

Among the four Śreṣṭha cases, two are of cases of men who left the village after they deserted their wives and began to live with other women. If we omit these cases because they do not constitute the 'village population', the percentage for the Śreṣṭhas falls to 1.7 and the total percentage to 2.4 (still including non-*pārpācuke* 'divorce' cases). Thus divorce is infrequent and is not thought to occur easily in Satungal.

#### *Widow remarriage*

Out of twenty-six cases in which Satungal men died leaving their wives as widows, nine women (three Śreṣṭhas, five Maharjans, and one Putuwār) remarried and left the village. When remarrying, one went with her child, five left their children, and three were childless. People here say, as other Newars do (see Nepali 1965: 246), that a widow or a divorced woman can take her children with her if they are below 12 years old, but many leave their children unless they have daughters below 2 or 3 years.

Among the other seventeen widows who have been staying in their marital houses, there are several who lost their husbands in their old age as well as those who have been raising their children in their deceased husbands' houses. As there is little probability that old widows remarry, we can say that the number of widows who could but did not remarry was about ten. Looking at the matter

this way, we notice that the number of widows who remarried amounts to nearly a half of those who had the possibility of remarriage. Thus, though the number of remarried women is not so great, it has to be admitted that the frequency of widow remarriage here is considerable.

### 3.3. Extent of the marriage area

G. S. Nepali points out that territorial endogamy is one of the characteristic features of Newar society (Nepali 1965: 419). This aspect is given a central position in Quigley's discussion. 'It is kinship and marriage through the idiom of caste which are however the most important means of exclusivity. In theory, and still very much in practice, Newars marry Newars not only of their caste but of the *local* sub-caste. By "local" I mean usually within half an hour's walk and often much less' (Quigley 1987: 160). No doubt this assertion by Quigley is inspired by his main research site, Dhulikhel, which shows a strong endogamous tendency (Quigley 1984: 240). Toffin's conclusions are not as clear-cut as Quigley's and he is more attentive to local differences, but in his theory one of the two major social types of the Newars is represented by Pyangaon, which is basically endogamous (Toffin 1984: 71, 592). On the other hand, he shows that the marriage area of the inhabitants of Panauti, which represents the other 'urban' type, is not limited to the Valley of Banepa but extends to various parts of the Kathmandu Valley. He rightly points out that the percentage of endogamy and the marriage area vary considerably according to caste (Toffin 1984: 406–7). Other studies either corroborate the above assertions or go against them. Lewis's study of the Tulādhars of Kathmandu (T. T. Lewis 1984: 183, fig. IV-8) and Vergati's account of Bhaktapur (Vergati 1979: 118) provide examples of local endogamy. Vergati also adds that there are Bhaktapur Maharjans who marry Kathmandu Maharjan women. The studies of B. Pradhan (1981: 58–60), Löwdin (1986: 146), and Gellner (p. 219 below) show that Bulu Maharjans, Sunakothi Maharjans, and Vajrācāryas in Lalitpur are not locally endogamous.

Here I examine the marriage area of Satungal and make it clear that the above theories of Newar endogamy have only a limited local applicability. I show the location of the *thaḥchē* ('own', i.e. parents', home) of the married women living in Satungal in Table 4.4 and the location of the husbands' houses of women who married out from Satungal in Table 4.5 (as of 1970). The data in the latter are not comprehensive. In the tables, the settlements are grouped into the following six areas (see Fig. 1.2 above):

- (A) within the village of Satungal;
- (B) the neighbouring area of Satungal (a rough triangle formed by Thankot, Svayambhu, and Tau Daha pond south of Cobhar as its three corners);

- (C) the area to the south of Lalitpur (south of Hanumānte and Manoharā rivers);
- (D) the north and east part of the Kathmandu Valley and the Banepa Valley;
- (E) cities (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur);
- (F) outside the Kathmandu Valley and the Banepa Valley.

From Table 4.4 it is evident that the Satungal marriage area extends to other settlements. It is also clear that there are considerable caste differences. In the case of the Maharjans, the total percentage of the wives from areas C, D, E, and F only amounts to 3 per cent of the caste total whereas 80 per cent are from area B and 17 per cent from within the village (area A). On the other hand, only 27 per cent of the Śreṣṭha wives are from area B, and 16, 22, and 20 per cent come from areas A, C, and F respectively. The proportion of cases married within the village is around 16 and 17 per cent and does not differ much between the Śreṣṭhas and the Maharjans. Put another way, the total of wives who come from 'nearby' (e.g. areas A and B) amounts to 97 per cent among Maharjans and 43 per cent among Śreṣṭhas. This tells us that Maharjans tend to marry within a small area whereas Śreṣṭhas look further afield.

G. S. Nepali shows that about half of 134 wives in Panga are from the neighbouring villages and a little less than a half from within the village (Nepali 1965: 208). This situation is comparable to the Maharjan case in Satungal. Though Nepali does not give any breakdown by caste in his figures, it is certain that the majority of them are Maharjans as Maharjans far outnumber others in Panga (Nepali 1965: 192–3). As such, Nepali's 'territorial endogamy', as far as the rural area is concerned, mainly represents the situation of the Maharjans, but not others.

Villagers in Satungal are well aware of this caste difference and say that many Śreṣṭhas marry with people of Lubhu etc. whereas Maharjans marry nearby. A Maharjan man explained that Śreṣṭhas do so because of the small number of nearby villages inhabited by them. But this demographic explanation cannot be accepted at face value today, because it is clear from my rough data that (even excepting Kirtipur) the Śreṣṭha population in areas A and B far exceeds the population of Pyangaon Swāgumi (Toffin 1984: 67, 81) and is comparable to that of Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas (Quigley 1984: 83), both of whom practise village endogamy. Thus, it can be said that many Śreṣṭhas here get their spouses from outside the surrounding area even though it is possible to marry nearby. However, the above explanation may have been more applicable in the past. As we see in the next section, there is information to suggest that in those days some Śreṣṭha groups did not marry with other Śreṣṭha groups with whom they have affinal ties now. This means that in the past Śreṣṭhas were divided into smaller endogamous groups of different statuses. If we combine this fact with the presumed smaller population in the past, it is probable that the number of possible spouses of the Śreṣṭhas was more limited than it is today and that they

TABLE 4.4. *Location of thaḥchē (parents' home) of the married women living in Satungal (figures = numbers of women)*

Area/Location		Castes				Castes with a single household
		Śreṣṭha	Maharjan	Putuwār	Khaḍgī	
A	Within Satungal	<u>16</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
B	Bosigāū		6			
	Balambu	1	27			Kāpālī 1
	Kisipīḍi		23			
	Naikāp	12	12		1	
	Luhnkoṭ	3	4			
	Tāpkhel	2	6	2		
	Māchegāū	2	<u>118</u>	5	4	
	Thānkoṭ	4	10			
	Kīrtipur		8	3		Mānandhar 1
	Pāngā		4			
	Cobhār		3			
	Kwenā		3			
	Others	2	12			
C	Sānāgāū	4				
	Lubhu	10				
	Harisiddhi	1				
	Cāpāgāū	2	<u>0</u>	1—1	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	Bungamati	2				
	Pharping	1				
	Others	2				
D	Paśupati & vicinity		2		2	
	Hāḍigāū		1			
	Dharamthali				2	
	Ṭokhā				1	
	Sākhu	3	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>		
	Buḍhānilkāṇṭha					Nakarmī 1
	Banepā				1	
	Nālā			2		
	Others	5		1	1	
E	Kathmandu	2			2	
	Lalitpur	4	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	6	Brāhmaṇ 1
	Bhaktapur					
F	Dhāding jillā <sup>a</sup>	6				
	Makwānpur jillā <sup>b</sup>	6	1			
	Kābhre & Sindhu-pālcok jillā <sup>c</sup>	<u>20</u>	<u>2</u>	0	0	<u>0</u>
	Nuwākoṭ jillā <sup>d</sup>	6	1			
		2				
	Total	98	148	9	23	4

Note: Underlined numbers are totals for each section.

<sup>a</sup> To the west of the Valley (villages: Nalang, Kewalpur, etc.).

<sup>b</sup> To the south-west of the Valley (Pālunḡ, Pāntran, etc.).

<sup>c</sup> To the east of the Valley (Phulbāri, Cautārā, etc.).

<sup>d</sup> To the north-west of the Valley (Nuwākoṭ and its vicinity).

TABLE 4.5. *Location of husbands' houses of women born in Satungal (figures = numbers of women)*

Area/Location		Castes				Castes with a single household
		Śreṣṭha	Maharjan	Putuwār	Khaḍgī	
A	Within Satungal	<u>16</u>	<u>25</u>	0	3	0
B	Bosigāū		14			
	Balambu		15			
	Kisipidi		13			
	Naikāp	3	6			
	Luhnkoṭ	4	2			
	Tāpkhel		8	0		
	Māchegāū		74		2	0
	Thānkoṭ	1			1	
	Kīrtipur				1	
	Pāngā		3			
	Kwenā		5			
	Others		5			
C	Sānāgāū	5				
	Lubhu	10				
	Harisiddhi	1				
	Ṭhaibwa	5				
	Bāḍegāū	26	1—1		0	0
	Cāpāgāū					
	Bungamati			1—1		
	Pharpiṅg	1				
	Others	2				
D	Paśupati	1—1				
	Manmaiju		1—1	0		0
	Dharamthali				1—1	
E	Kathmandu	3	1	1—1	3	Mānandhar 1
	Lalitpur	3	2		1	
	Bhaktapur	1			4	
F	Tarāi, India <sup>a</sup>	0	0	0	3—3	0
	Total	54	104	2	13	1

Note: Underlined numbers are totals for each section.

<sup>a</sup> Heṭaūḍā, 'Mades', and Calcutta are the names mentioned. (No place-names just outside the Kathmandu Valley were recorded.)

had to have a wider marriage area than the Maharjans. Today, though the formerly endogamous groups are no longer closed as regards marriage, the concern with group and household prestige persists. For a variety of reasons, then, Śreṣṭhas continue to be more concerned with prestige than Maharjans, and tend to seek their spouses further afield.

The overall weakness of the bond with the three cities and with area D should be noted (except for a few minority castes, including the Khaḍgīs). One of the reasons for this may be the endogamous tendency of the cities (though

this still needs to be substantiated). The lack of existing social ties, the difference of life-style, and the prestige factor attached to city life should also be taken into account. In 1971 a Śreṣṭha father told me of his hope to send his daughter (at that time 10 years old) to Kathmandu in marriage and that he wanted his sons not to have agricultural jobs. It should be noted that the father did not want to get his sons' wives from the urban area because the household depended heavily upon women's labour. When I returned to the village in 1984, I found that the daughter had married a man in Thaibwa with a white-collar job. The fact that there were at that time only a few marriage ties with city people, who were probably unwilling to obtain wives from rural areas, seems to have prevented the father's wish from being realized in this case.

When we compare Tables 4.4 and 4.5 we notice that the proportion of women who married out from this village to the cities is higher than that of the women who married into the village from them. This can be understood if we think of the need for women's labour pointed out above. In both cases, the numbers of marriages with city people are quite small. Thus even though Kathmandu and Lalitpur are geographically nearer to Satungal than many villages, villagers (especially Śreṣṭhas) have more ties with rural settlements south of Lalitpur.

As for other castes, we notice that the marriage area of the Khadgīs differs from other castes in that it extends to areas D and E as well as areas A and B. That of the Putuwārs also spreads out to a certain extent but they have no relation with the cities. These characteristics are largely due to the small population and uneven distribution of these castes.

There are few ties with Bhaktapur and the Banepa–Nala area, which reflects the historical and linguistic separation between them and the rest of the Valley. On the other hand, the close link of Satungal Śreṣṭhas with villages to the south of Lalitpur can be attributed to the earlier situation where Satungal was included in Lalitpur *ilākā* (an administrative area which had Lalitpur as its capital and included settlements to the south and west of Lalitpur). The considerable number of ties with the area outside the Valley is almost certainly due to the emigration of people from settlements already related to this village.

We have seen in this section that the Satungal marriage area extends beyond the village, especially to the surrounding area and to the area south of Lalitpur, though there are considerable caste differences. It contrasts with Pyangaon, Dhulikhel, and some of the urban castes in that it is not endogamous. Rather, the situation in Satungal resembles that of Sunakothi, Panauti, and some others, though Toffin classifies Panauti among urban settlements. It needs to be emphasized that most of the Newar local communities and castes so far reported to practise endogamy are either those of cities or in the peripheral areas of the Kathmandu Valley. The fact that the marriage ties of Satungal people extend to many other localities indicates that those other localities are not endogamous either, at least regarding the castes dealt with here. The

material given in this chapter suggests that such non-endogamous localities (including Satungal) are mainly situated in the intermediate area between the cities and the periphery. And it is in this 'intermediate' area that many of the representative Newar rural settlements are located.

It is my contention that the generalization that Newars marry in a very small area should be modified by taking into account these 'intermediate' localities. But further studies are necessary in order to clarify the extent of variation of the marriage areas of different castes and different localities.

#### 4. *Affinal Relations*

A considerable diversity can be found in the existing literature concerning the affinal relations of the Newars. Nepali, studying Panga and Kathmandu, emphasizes the obligations of the mother's brother (MB) and married-out woman's roles toward her natal home (Nepali 1965: 89–119, 279–80). Toffin characterizes the relations between affines in Pyangaon as symmetric and those in Panauti as asymmetric (except for impure castes, among whom affinal relations are based on mutual co-operation). He relates the first to the endogamous character of Pyangaon, its supposed original structure of two proto-clans, and its system of affinal prestations (Toffin 1984: 165–7, 413–18). According to Quigley (1984: 261–2), relations between affines in Dhulikhel are characterized by restraint and the absence of gift-giving or co-operation. Löwdin, who studied Maharjans in Sunakothi, points out that the affinal relation is often close, that gifts of food are quite common between affines, and that 'the stream of gifts between the two households should preferably be to the advantage of the husband's household' (Löwdin 1986: 66).

In Satungal there are a number of obligations between affinally linked persons and households. They make prestations when they participate in each other's life-cycle rituals (including funerals and post-mortuary rites) and when they jointly celebrate certain calendrical rituals. They occasionally exchange services, particularly during busy agricultural seasons. Limitations of space preclude a detailed description of rituals here; however a summary and analysis of affinal prestations is given in Table 4.6(a)–(d).

Affinal relations in Satungal are not as restrained or symmetric as elsewhere; they are accompanied by prestations and co-operation which can be characterized as 'generalized reciprocity'. The affinal relations of the Śreṣṭhas and the Maharjans differ to some extent.

##### 4.1. *Betrothal and wedding prestations*

As seen in Table 4.6(b), the betrothal gifts, which are made only among the Śreṣṭhas these days, move from the groom's side to the bride's side.<sup>11</sup> These



TABLE 4.6. *Affinal prestations and services*(a) *Prestations to the bride at wedding*

*kwasah* (presents to the bride from her family, agnates, friends, and neighbours): clothes, utensils, furniture, spinning wheels, straw mats, domestic animals, money, etc. are given at the ritual of *gway kāyegu* at the bride's house on the evening of the first day of the wedding.

*tisā-wasah* (presents to the bride in the name of the groom from his father): gold, earrings, other ornaments, clothes, other things to wear.

(b) *From the wife-taking side to the wife-giving side**At betrothal*

*gway biyegu* (giving betel nuts): among Śr: betel nuts, nuts, sweets (*lakhā mari* etc.), curds, fruits, vegetables, spices, cloth, etc. are sent several days to one month before the wedding.

*sisā pusā* (gifts of fruits etc.): among Śr: bananas, sugar canes, sweets, curds, etc. are sent four days before the wedding under the condition that *khwā swahwanegu* is practised after the wedding.

*At wedding*

*pāju-ku* (items given by groom's MB and brought in the wedding procession by the groom's side): among Mh: beaten rice, meat, *taḥkhāh*, pulse cakes, pulse and vegetable dishes, molasses, ginger, rice beer, etc.

*gifts from the groom's parents and lami (go-between)*: among Mh: a sugar-cane stalk, fish, clothes, other things to wear (from groom's father to bride's father); betel nuts, utensils, clothes (from groom's mother to bride's mother); a sugar-cane stalk, curds (from *lami* to bride's brother).

*After wedding*

*pyenhūyā swahtiku chwayegu* (to send people for invitation on the fourth day of the wedding): among Śr: a messenger, *lami*, bride's sisters, and brothers are given eggs, sweets, meat, etc. when they go to the bride's marital house to invite the bride to her parents' house.

*pyenhūyā bhamcā wayegu*<sup>a</sup> (bride comes on the fourth day) or *bhauyāta jwanegu* (to catch the bride): among Mh: the bride, her mother-in-law, and sister-in-law visit the bride's parents' house with beaten rice, meat, rice beer, pulse and vegetable dishes, eggs, sweets, curds, etc.

*After childbirth*

*macā buḥ kanke chwayegu* (to send (a messenger) to announce the childbirth): among Śr: ginger, molasses, two nutmegs, *imu* seeds, vermilion, money (Rs.1) are sent with a messenger (Mh or Putuwār) on the day of the birth. (Among Mh, husband's close kin goes to announce the birth without any gift.)

*macā buḥ swah wayegu*<sup>a</sup> (to come to see childbirth) or *māju lā nakah wayegu* (for mother-in-law to come to feed meat): new-born child's father's mother visits the child and its mother staying in the latter's *thahchē* since the day of *macā buḥ lahī yenegu* (to take out the new-born child (and its mother)) which falls on the day one month and four days after the birth, with meat, clarified butter, beaten rice, pulse, vegetable dishes, spices, liquor, rice beer, etc.

*At funeral*

*sithā yēkegu* (funeral procession): sons-in-law come to carry the bier of their parents-in-law often among Mh but less often among Śr. (Not obligatory.)

<sup>a</sup> *Wayegu* (to come) can be substituted for *wanegu* (to go) in this kind of expression.

gifts are much less valuable than the wedding prestations. It is interesting to note that there is a kind of gift made only under the condition that the givers are assured of a return prestation (*sisā pusā/khwā swah wanegu*).

At the wedding, the principal presents are *kwasah* (from the bride's relatives, friends, and neighbours—for details, see Table 4.6(a)) and *tisā-wasah* (ornaments and clothes from the wife-taker's side), both given to the bride. In

TABLE 4.6. *Continued*(c) *Prestations and services made by married woman towards members of her natal household (thaḥchê)**At life cycle rituals of her brother's children (FZ's roles)*

*jā nakegu* (to feed rice (for the first time) to a child about half a year after its birth): when it is celebrated fully, married women go to their *thaḥchê* and give clothes, *khê sagā* (auspicious foods consisting of an egg, pulse cake, liquor, meat or fish) and other foods to their nephews.

*bwaskhā* (*bu sâ khā*) (cutting the baby hair when a boy is 3 to 7 years old): the boy's FZ gives him *khê sagā*, clothes and other things to wear. When the boy's hair is shaved, she receives the hair in a tray covered with a cloth and goes to a river to throw it in.

*kaytā pūjā* (loin cloth ritual; boy's initiation at 10 to 15 years of age): the boy's FZ brings clothes and *khê sagā* and plays the same role as in *bwaskhā*.

*bārā tayegu* (confinement of girls for twelve days before the first menstruation) FZ brings pulse, grains and maize on the sixth day and *sarwāki* (mixture of husked and unhusked rice) and a piece of cloth on the last day.

*At old-age celebration, funeral, and post-mortuary rites of her parents and brothers (daughter's and sister's roles)*

*burā jākwa* (old-age celebration at 77 and twice after that): the old man's sisters and daughters come, wash his feet and offer money (*dakṣiṇā*) as they do to gods.

*sithā yēkegu*; among Mh, daughters join the funeral procession of their parents. One of them scatters unhusked rice (*pwaḥ hwalegu*) on the way to the cremation ground. Among Śr, women stay weeping in the house of the deceased.

*lwaḥcā* (feeding of the deceased on the sixth day after death): married daughters and sisters come to the house of the deceased and offer beaten rice, pulse, curds, vegetables, etc. to the deceased and the chief mourner.

*nhaynhūmā* (the seventh-day mourning): married daughters and sisters come to the house of the deceased with rice, meat, eggs, vegetables, etc. and give them to a Kāpālī, who receives them in the name of the deceased.

*ghaḥsūh* (house purification on the twelfth day after death), *śrāddha* (ritual to give offerings to the dead held one and a half months (*latyā*), six months (*khulā*), one year (*dakilā*), two years (*nidāthiti*) after death, and every year after that for some time): married daughters and sisters join the feast held in the house of the deceased.

*Prestations in calendrical festivals and rituals*

Mārthi-āmāi (Np. Mātātīrtha-aūsī, mother's day (new moon) in Apr.-May), Gokaṛṇa-āmāi (Np. Gokaṛṇa-aūsī, father's day (new moon) in Aug.-Sept.): women who have either or both parents alive go to their *thaḥchê* and offer *khê sagā* to their mother or father. They take a load, called Mārthi-āmāi *ku* and Gokaṛṇa-āmāi *ku*, consisting of rice, meat, fish eggs, pulse cakes, pickles, vegetable preparation, curds, liquor, etc. (Those who have lost their parent(s) go to Mātātīrtha and/or Gokaṛṇa on the mother's and/or father's day for bathing.)

Kijā pūjā (younger brother worship, on the last day of Swanti (Tihār) festival in Oct.-Nov.): married sisters come to their *thaḥchê* to give blessings to their brothers. They bring a load (*kijā pūjā ku*) consisting of foods and other things (fruits, beaten rice, meat, fish, eggs, pulse cakes, vegetable preparation, pickles, rice beer, liquor, flower garlands, etc.).

addition to these, foods are brought from the wife-taker's side among both Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans while gifts are given from the groom's parents to the bride's parents among the Maharjans. There are caste differences also in the prestations made just after the wedding; among the Śreṣṭhas gifts from the wife-givers exceed those from the wife-takers but among the Maharjans it is the other way around. Among Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans equally, the value of post-marital prestations is much less than that of *kwasah* and *tisā-wasah*.

TABLE 4.6. *Continued*(d) *Prestations and services from the wife-giving side to the wife-taking side**At wedding*

bride with *kwasah* (see Table 4.6(a) and the text for *kwasah*).

*jilijā* (*jilājā*) *bwanegu* (to invite son-in-law): among Mh: the newly wed couple, their friends, *lami*, and the husband's father are invited to and feasted in the bride's house; the bride is given a basket of beaten rice, meat, pulse cake, rice beer, and twelve eggs from her parents; just after the main wedding feast at the groom's house.

*After wedding*

*khwā swah wanegu* (to go to see the face (of the bride), on the day after the wedding): among Śr who have received *sisā pusā*; the bride's father, brothers, MB, etc. visit the groom's house with plates of fruits, sweets, liquor, worshipping goods, a set of clothes and money (Rs.50–100 each), and a golden ring (provided by the bride's father).

*lidhu cākegu* (to open inside (?)) or *jilijā bwanegu* (to invite son-in-law, one or several days after wedding): among Śr, if *khwā swah wanegu* is not performed; eggs, pulse cakes, liquor, sweets, etc. are carried to the husband's house by a messenger. The couple, husband's friends, and *lami* visit the bride's *thahchē* and are feasted. People there give gifts of sweets, packs of spices to the groom and his friends, a pack of spices to the *lami* and a set of clothes, fruits, sweets, eggs, liquor, and curds to the bride.

*pyenhūyā bhamcā wayegu* or *bhauyāta jwankegu* (the same ritual as the one listed in Table 4.6(b) with the same name): among Mh: visitors from the marital house are given unhusked rice when they visit the bride's parents' house with foods.

*After childbirth*

*dhau-baji nakah wanegu* (to go to feed *dhau-baji*) or *dhau-baji nakegu* (to feed *dhau-baji*): pregnant woman's mother visits her daughter and feeds her with *dhau-baji* (beaten rice with curds), meat, eggs, sweets, pulse preparation, and liquor among Śr; pregnant woman comes to her parents' house to eat *dhau-baji*, meat, sweets, etc. among Mh, in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy.

*macā buh kanke chwayegu* (the same ritual as the one listed in Table 4.6(b)): among Śr: the same kinds of food, but double the amounts sent, are returned on the same day through the same bearer.

*ghyahle siyā baji nakah wanegu* (to go to feed (the child) with beaten rice parched in clarified butter)—among Śr: *cāku baji nakah wanegu* (to go to feed molasses and beaten rice)—among Mh: wife's mother and/or other female members of her household come to feed her daughter (baby's mother) and midwife with parched beaten rice, molasses, *imu* seeds, etc., one or two days after the birth.

*macā buh bēkegu* (to purify childbirth): clothes for a new-born child and its parents, a quilt, straw mats, *macā kathi* ('child poles' for putting cloth to protect baby from sunlight), vessels, utensils, foods (beaten rice, rice, meat, vegetables, clarified butter, molasses, liquor (and a buffalo head or its half (if the first child is a daughter)) on the birth of the first child) are sent among Śr; beaten rice, soya beans, ginger, green pea flour, pulse cakes, half-roasted meat in the case of the first child only are sent among Mh, ten or twelve days after the birth of a son, and four, six, or twelve days after the birth of a daughter.

*lā nakah wanegu* (to go to feed meat): among Mh: the baby's mother's mother visits its house with meat, liquor, beans, beaten rice, unleavened bread, etc., eight days or two weeks after birth.

*cāku nakah wanegu* (to go to feed molasses): the baby's mother's mother visits its house with vegetables, beans, molasses, clarified butter, etc., fifteen to twenty days after the birth.

*macā buh swah wanegu* (to go to see childbirth; about one month after childbirth): meat, beaten rice, molasses, clarified butter, liquor, cooked vegetables are brought by wife's mother (WM), other family members, and *phuki* among Śr (many persons participate at the birth of the first child but WM alone in other cases). Among Mh, WM brings similar foods to the child's house at the birth of the second and subsequent children, but *dāmra bhway* is held at the birth of the first child (see below). Among both castes, similar foods as above are brought by husband's mother's siblings.

TABLE 4.6. *Continued*

*dāmra bhway* (a large feast in the husband's house; about one to one and a half months after the birth of the first child): among Mh: all the foods for the feast (beaten rice, meat, vegetable preparation, liquor, curds, betel nuts, coconuts, fruits, spices, etc.) comparable to those in the wedding feast are brought by the wife's parent's family, *phuki*, their affines and other kin, who participate in the feast. Wife's mother gives money, *dhau sagā* (an auspicious present of curds and a cloth), bedding, and clothing to the new-born baby. Husband's parents are given sets of clothes by their in-laws.

*jā nakegu*: when celebrated, new-born child's MB brings clothes and *khē sagā*.

*At initiation rituals*

*bwaskhā*: among Śr; boy's MB and his wife bring foods for feast (beaten rice, meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, pulse, ginger, pulse cakes, etc.) and clothes. The MB cuts the boy's hair first.

*kaytā pūjā*: boy's MB brings *pāju ku* (a set of clothes, *khē sagā*, beaten rice, meat, vegetable and pulse preparation, curds, ginger, an animal for sacrifice), cuts the boy's hair first, and catches the boy who pretends to leave in order to follow the ascetic life. He is given clothes by the boy's family.

*ihī*: girl's MB brings rice and cloth.

*bārā tayegu*: MBW (and MZ) bring same things on the same days as FZs do (see 4.6(c)).

*Prestations in calendrical festivals and rituals*

Mhā pūjā (body worship, on the day before last of Swanti): a load of foods and other things ('Mhā pūjā *ku*') similar to those in Kijā pūjā is sent from the wife's parents' home to her marital house; every year among Mh and at the first Mhā pūjā after marriage among Śr.

Yahmari-punhi (full moon of *yahmari* in Nov.–Dec.): among Śr: a load (*yahmari ku* or *li-ku*) of feast foods (beaten rice, meat, pulse cakes, vegetable dishes, pickles, rice beer, liquor, etc.) and fifty to a hundred pieces of *yahmari* (sweet rice cakes of a conical shape) is sent from the wife's natal home.

[In addition to the above, married women are invited to their *thahchē* on the occasion of a number of calendrical festivals and rituals.]

Notes: Śr = Śreṣṭha; Mh = Maharjan; MB = mother's brother; FZ = father's sister.

Unless specified otherwise, rituals are performed by both Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans.

The monetary value of *tisā-wasaḥ* is more or less equivalent to that of *kwasah* which means that both sides equally contribute to the wedding gifts to the bride. The people of Satungal also say that both husband and wife have *hak* (right) in *kwasah* in the ordinary course of life. But when *pārpācuke* (divorce) takes place, it is returned (*lita biye*) to the woman and the latter has to return the *tisā-wasaḥ*.

Toffin (1984: 414), dealing with Panauti, states that *kwasah* belongs to the wife all her life. According to Quigley (1984: 256), wedding gifts formally remain the property of the bride. In Satungal, many of the *kwasah* goods are used in common by members of her marital household, between whom distinctions of individual property are not clearly made, at least not in everyday life. Marital household members are, to some extent, direct beneficiaries of *kwasah*. (Hence the expression 'return (of *kwasah*)' at the time of divorce.) This being so, we can say that there is in some vague sense a prestation from the wife-giving side to the wife-taking side in the giving of *kwasah*, though it is primarily a present to the bride.

The bride herself can be considered as a gift (Toffin 1984: 166), but in this case, there is no way (and no notion among the people) of calculating the value of the gift. In any case, the bride moves to the groom's side with the *kwasah* and *tisā-wasaḥ*.



PLATE 9. A dresser, part of the dowry (*kwasah*) in a Śreṣṭha marriage, being carried by a Maharjan and a Putuwār from the bride's natal home in Satungal to the groom's house in the village of Thaibwa. (*H. Ishii*)

If we take all of the above into account, marriage exchange in Satungal is in favour of the wife-takers' side. There are certain differences between the Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans. Among the latter slightly more gifts from the groom's side are made. Maharjan weddings are also characterized by the participation of a greater number of women and the existence of a role for the groom's mother's brother.

#### 4.2. Before and after childbirth

According to Toffin, in Pyangaon the prestations following the birth of a child are extremely asymmetric. The Satungal material of the prestations after childbirth in Table 4.6(b) and (d) corroborates this, as people of the wife's parents' side visit the husband's house with foods many times whereas visiting in the other direction is much less frequent. However, the series of prestations in this

phase cannot be interpreted as a clear-cut exchange between the wife-givers and wife-takers. First, the new-born child and its mother form the focus of feeding rituals and they receive foods at the place where they stay; when they stay at the child's mother's *thaḥchê*, its paternal grandmother visits there with foods (see *macā buḥ swaḥ wayegu* in Table 4.6(b)). Secondly, as Quigley (1984: 162) points out, married daughters are 'both insiders and outsiders'. Though the formal social position of a married woman changes with marriage, she stays at her parents' home for a considerable period in the early stage of marriage and after the childbirth. Her affective ties with her parents and siblings remain strong and her socio-ritual obligations toward them persist, though with modifications. Thus it can be said that the foods presented to her from her natal kin are at the same time presents to the married woman who formally belongs to the husband's family *and* to the daughter whose separation from her *thaḥchê* is not complete. On the other hand, the newborn child is assimilated to his father's family from birth and the presents to him can be interpreted as being made to his natal family (or the wife-takers' side).

In this way we notice that there are two aspects in the prestations of feeding: that between the wife-givers and the wife-takers, and that between the married-out daughter and her natal kin. However, these aspects are not distinguished in actual prestations; in other words, what has to be given is specified precisely, but the recipient—bride or wife-takers—is not. This makes it impossible and meaningless to calculate accurately what proportion of the amount of foods is given to the daughter and what proportion to her marital household.

#### 4.3. Other life-cycle rituals and calendrical rituals

Toffin argues that the mother's brother's role becomes more important in the course of the child's growth than that of its father (Toffin 1984: 166). In Satungal, however, the parents' roles are very important in the child's socialization as well as in rituals. The father is indispensable, especially in *ihī*. Unlike in Pyangaon where village endogamy prevails, mother's brothers are not in many cases available within the village in everyday life and it is within the family and among the patri-kin and neighbours that children are socialized. Besides, boys' initiation rituals are often performed as small household rituals where even the MB need not be invited. Thus the MB's role in Satungal can be said to be lighter than in Pyangaon.

This said, we still have to note that the MB's ritual roles increase as the child grows older; his roles are negligible in feeding rituals but acquire importance after *jā nakegu* (first rice-feeding) and in initiation rituals if they are performed in an elaborate way.

At the same time, Table 4.6(c) tells us that married-out women are indispensable on many occasions.<sup>12</sup> Their husbands' services are also important. In the early years of marriage, a woman is weakly incorporated into her husband's

family and her position in her natal household remains very strong. Later, she becomes more established in her marital home but gradually loses her stronghold in her natal home as her sisters-in-law grow more settled. By the time she plays the role of FZ, her position *vis-à-vis* her *thaḥchē* approaches that of an affine.

Both wife-givers and wife-takers participate in many life-cycle rituals, but there are fewer chances of the MB's participation in *burā jākwa*, funeral, and post-mortuary rites, whereas married-out women are expected to play a role in these. Moreover, there are voluntary services at funerals and in agricultural work performed by people from the wife-takers' side towards their in-laws. It is said among both Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans that the bier is to be carried by two sons-in-law of the deceased if there are such. However this is not obligatory. If sons-in-law are not available, *guthiyārs* or other villagers of the same caste carry the bier. According to my observation, it is more usual that the bier is carried by *guthiyārs* among the Śreṣṭhas and by sons-in-law or other caste-mates among the Maharjans.

On the occasions of Mārthi-āmāi and Gokaṇṇa-āmāi, prestations are directed only towards the women's natal home. In Mhā pūjā and Kijā pūjā taken together, the gift-giving is reciprocated between affines over two days. On the other hand, in Yaḥmari-punhi, the direction of the gift (which is quite like the rituals of feeding) is towards the wife-receivers. The latter is given by some Śreṣṭhas only.

Taken together, the quantity of prestations given to the wife-givers (excluding the periods of marriage and childbirth) possibly exceeds that given to the wife-takers. What is more important to note is that an accurate calculation of the total amount of prestations (including services) is not possible because of the ambivalent position of married women and the voluntary nature of some services. It should be added that Maharjans show a slightly stronger tendency than Śreṣṭhas to make prestations to affines.

#### 4.4. Co-operation in agricultural work and other relations between affines

As I pointed out in a previous paper, labour from outside the household is acquired through *bwalā* (exchange labour), *jyāmi* (hired labour on a daily basis), and *gwāli* (help) (Ishii 1980: 169–74). In *gwāli* or *gwāhāli* (Np. *guhār*), it is often seen that affines co-operate with no direct compensation. As regards this, Quigley states that 'nothing of this kind exists in Dhulikhel' and that 'an arrangement such as *gwāli*, in any formal sense, would be almost inconceivable in Dhulikhel where relations between affines tend to be characterised by extreme formality verging on avoidance' (Quigley 1985a: 37). On the other hand, B. Pradhan (1981: 103) briefly refers to 'Gwāli labour' (help between close relatives and neighbours usually given to people who are sick, disabled, or old)

in Bulu just to the north of Pyangaon. Toffin (1984: 166), in his account of Pyangaon, points out that 'the son-in-law has to work for his wife's parents: he has to help them take in the harvest, pound grain, husk paddy etc.' In Panauti by contrast, the relation between in-laws is quite restrained and the son-in-law there does not carry the bier of his parents-in-law (however, mutual co-operation prevails among low castes) (Toffin 1984: 418). These examples clearly show that there is a great difference in the relations between in-laws in different Newar settlements and castes.

In Satungal, the affinal relation forms the core of the *gwāli* group. In this form of labour exchange, the flow of labour from the wife-taker's side towards the wife-giver's side exceeds the reverse, though there are other kinds of flow too. Among the workers from the wife-takers' side, married women comprise about one third and the rest are other members of their households including husbands, children, and (less frequently) the married woman's parents-in-law. This tells us that people of the wife-taker's side other than married women work for their in-laws to a considerable extent. It should also be noted that the proportion of *gwāli* in agricultural work is low compared to other types of labour (less than ten per cent of the total workers in the fields). No meaningful difference is found between the Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans as regards the intensity of dependence on *gwāli*. The relation in *gwāli* contrasts with *bwalā*, exchange in which the same amount of labour is returned within the season.

The existence of *gwāli* (and co-operation in funerals) in Satungal makes the affinal relation here different from Dhulikhel and Panauti. On the other hand, the *gwāli* in Satungal differs from the service obligation of the sons-in-law in Pyangaon in important points. In Pyangaon, the son-in-law runs the risk of serious disgrace in the community if he refuses to fulfil his obligation of working for his parents and coming to his father-in-law's funeral to make and carry the bier (Toffin 1984: 166). People in Satungal say that there is no rule (among the Śreṣṭhas, Maharjans, and other castes) that the son-in-law has to work for his father-in-law, but it is acceptable and well regarded if he goes to practise *gwāli*. In fact the attitudes of the people of Satungal are ambivalent on this question. They say that it is not considered so good if the son-in-law serves his parents-in-law because his position is like that of a *ghar-jwāī* (Np., Nw. a man living with his father-in-law who is usually considered to be subordinated to the latter), but giving *gwāli* (help) is different. The fact that sons-in-law have no obligatory role in Satungal funerals is parallel to the relation involved in *gwāli*. However, Maharjans are more apt to come to carry the bier of their parents-in-law than Śreṣṭhas. Unlike affinal co-operation in Pyangaon, *gwāli* help in Satungal is given both within and across the village boundary. It is characteristic of Satungal that the affinal relations found in *gwāli*—similar to what happens at funerals—are voluntary, favour one side (without being totally one-sided), and are not confined within the village.



If we turn to other aspects and see how language is used between in-laws, we notice that there is a difference between the Śreṣṭhas and Maharjans in that more reservation and respect are shown by affines among the former whereas more casual expressions are heard among the latter. A Śreṣṭha and his son-in-law (*jilājā*; *jilijā* in Satungal dialect) both use honorific words such as *jhāsā* ('please come') when they talk to each other. The son-in-law is addressed by an honorific *jicā-bhāju* instead of *jilijā*. On the other hand, among Maharjans parents-in-law and sons-in-law address each other with non-honorifics.

There is a notion among the Maharjans as well as the Śreṣṭhas that the son-in-law is equivalent to the god Nārāyaṇ (Viṣṇu) and in-laws should behave towards each other with due respect. But it is clear that the actual relation, especially among the Maharjans, is not usually dominated by such a Sanskritized notion.

#### 4.5. Comparison

We have seen that the prestations in marriage and the rituals of feeding are to the benefit of the wife-takers while the flow of services and goods from the wife-takers to the wife-givers in other exchanges more than compensates for this. For the reasons already given, it is difficult to calculate and compare the total amount of prestations made from each side, nor is it possible to give a concrete figure as to whether or not the taking of the bride in Satungal is counter-balanced by post-marital exchanges as in Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 166). In Pyangaon, affinal relations are symmetric, mainly because the son-in-law's lifelong obligation to work for his father-in-law counterbalances his taking the latter's daughter. By comparison, the system in Satungal is not symmetric. There seems to be no notion there that the total of affinal prestations should balance out.

This does not mean that there is no custom of calculating prestations and services: the amount of goods for each occasion is stipulated by custom. But these stipulations do not seem to have the purpose of creating a balance of prestations. Rather, the affinal relation, once established, is characterized by non-calculation and goodwill, which are shown not only by the MB and the FZ, but also by sons-in-law in both secular and ritual activities. On the other hand, we know that an exact and direct reciprocity is required in the case of the exchange labour (*bwālā*), the core of which is often formed by agnates (Ishii 1980: 170). The latter sharply contrasts with the relation included in *gwālī*, offered to a large extent by affines voluntarily. This contrast suggests that affinal relations here are not based on the principle of direct reciprocity but on what Sahlins (1965: 147) calls 'generalized reciprocity'.

If we compare this with other Newar settlements, affinal relations in Satungal differ greatly not only from those in Pyangaon but also from those in Dhulikhel, where they are characterized by restraint and, apparently, a lack of

gift-giving. Satungal rather resembles the situations in Panauti and Sunakothi but there are some important differences. Among the high castes in Panauti, the affinal relation is more restrained and sons-in-law do not carry the bier of their parents-in-law. Prestations similar to Satungal are found in Sunakothi, which is mainly inhabited by Maharjans, but sons-in-law there assume a greater economic burden (Löwdin 1986: 66) than those in Satungal. Thus Satungal can be placed in between Panauti and Sunakothi when seen from the present point of view. There are differences in terms of caste also. Śreṣṭhas in Satungal to some extent resemble high castes in Panauti and Maharjans here are more similar to Maharjans in Sunakothi, though it should be added that these two castes in Satungal share many common customs and the difference between them is not so great.

## 5. Patrilineal Kinship

The main social layers in this village can be summarized as follows:

*household* → *dyah pūjā unit* → *maximal lineage* → *sanāḥ guthi* → *local caste* → *village*.

As shown, there are several local castes in this village, and today the populous castes (Śreṣṭha and Maharjan) are divided into several *sanāḥ guthis* (or intra-caste funeral organizations: for their details see Ishii, forthcoming). Each of the *sanāḥ guthis* generally comprises several maximal lineages. But a maximal lineage may have members belonging to different *sanāḥ guthis*. There was only one Śreṣṭha and one Maharjan *sanāḥ guthi* about sixty and forty years ago respectively. Among less populous castes *sanāḥ guthis* are organized across village boundaries. The maximal lineage and its constituent groups, the *dyah pūjā* units, are the main subject of this section. A *dyah pūjā* unit is the group of people who worship the deity called *digu dyah* together. I will not give any detailed account of the household level, which should be dealt with separately.

### 5.1. Wards and maximal lineages

Satungal is divided into eighteen traditionally named wards called *tmāḥ* (Np. *tol*) which are different from the wards of the village *pañcāyat*. The village *pañcāyat* is divided into nine consecutively numbered wards, among which five belong to Satungal and four to a neighbouring settlement, Bwasigāū.

Traditional ward names are commonly used in everyday conversation. Their primary connotation is geographical, but some of the ward names are also used when referring to the traditional residents of those wards. Those who are called by the ward names, most usually by adding the suffix *-mi* ('people'), are patrilineally related men and their families, though in some cases it is not

actually possible to trace their descent to a common ancestor. It is to this range of kin that I apply the term 'maximal lineage'. These days, there are many wards inhabited by different castes or different kin groups within a caste. In such cases, only those people who are said to be the descendants of the original settler of the ward are referred to by the ward name. It is common for people who have moved to another ward within the village to be referred to by their original ward name. Thus, the members of a Maharjan family renting a house in Taḥnani ward, one of the Śreṣṭha wards, are still regarded as Dyahṇanimi since Dyahṇani ward is their original ward where most of their lineage mates are still living.

It is said that some of the Śreṣṭha maximal lineages used to be called by such names as Jugi ('ascetic'), Dhwa ('jackal'), Hukhā ('water-pipe'), Mwāli ('oboe'), and Duwā ('chief'). Today even old people refrain from using these names, saying that they are obsolete and pejorative. Many young people do not even know that such names were used. No other groups and castes in this village are said to have had this kind of name. These names are probably comparable to the 'clan'<sup>13</sup> names listed by Nepali (1965: 159–61), lineage names in Dhulikhel (Quigley 1985b: 31), 'clan' names in Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 73), and *thar* names in Panauti (ibid. 388). Today, maximal lineages here have no proper name except for some cases in which ward names are used. Just as Fürer-Haimendorf points out in his account of the Śreṣṭhas in Kathmandu (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 25), there is no well-defined indigenous term for 'maximal lineage' or 'lineage' in this village. I will return to this point when I deal with the meaning of the word *phuki*.

As I have done before, I put consecutive numbers (I, II, and so on) on all the maximal lineages in each caste and combine this with the abbreviations of the caste names (Sr = Śreṣṭha or Syesyah; Mh = Maharjan or Jyāpu; Pt = Putuwār or Duī; Kh = Khaḍgi or Nāy) and 'maximal lineage' (ML). Numbers of the households (= residential families) in each maximal lineage of four castes in 1970 and 1984 are shown in Table 4.7. Four other castes have only one household each in this village but have relatives outside.

As shown in Table 4.7, there are more than a dozen maximal lineages in each of the Śreṣṭha and Maharjan castes and the number of households in a maximal lineage ranges from only one to more than twenty. Some maximal lineages have their members living outside but their numbers are not counted in Table 4.7. In the cases of 'maximal lineages' having only a very few households, there is no middle social layer between the levels of 'maximal lineage' and household. In such cases, each maximal lineage forms one *dyah pūjā* unit, no group inside the 'maximal lineage' except households is formed, and each household has the same rights and duties towards other member households. (The word 'maximal' may not be necessary in such cases, but is used for the sake of consistency.) In populous maximal lineages, on the other hand, there are numbers of small groups which carry out particular rituals (above all, the worship of *digu dyah*).

TABLE 4.7. *Numbers of households in different maximal lineages by caste*

Śreṣṭha households			Maharjan households			Putuwār households		
	1970	1984		1970	1984		1970	1984
Śr-ML I	21	29	Mh-ML I	15	27	Pt-ML I	8	7
II	1	1	II	24	29	II	2	2
III	5	7	III	4	7	<i>Khadgī households</i>		
IV	9	11	IV	2	3	Kh-ML I	9	8
V	5	11	V	1	2	II	3	3
VI	2	5	VI	1	1	III	3	4
VII	2	1	VII	4	5	IV	1	1
VIII	1	1	VIII	3	3	V	1	2
IX	3	3	IX	19	24	<i>Castes with a single household</i>		
X	6	9	X	10	13	Brāhm aṇ		
XI	5	6	XI	4	7	Nakarmī		
XII	1	4	XII	3	3	Mānandhar		
XIII	1	1	XIII	1	1	Kāpālī		
XIV	1	1	XIV	7	7			
			XV	1	1			
			XVI	1	0			

Note: Śr = Śreṣṭha or Syesyaḥ; Mh = Maharjan or Jyāpu; Pt = Putuwār or Duī; Kh = Khadgī or Nāy; ML = 'maximal lineage'.

In those cases, the mutual obligations of members in such matters as the observation of mourning may differ depending upon the genealogical distance and sub-group membership.

The extent to which a maximal lineage appears as a delineated social unit differs from (maximal) lineage to lineage. Many of the small maximal lineages are formed by households whose heads are real brothers or cousins who co-operate together and have a clear sense of obligation towards each other. These groups can easily be distinguished as social units both subjectively and objectively. Furthermore, maximal lineages with a longer history of settlement in Satungal have more roles in the village, their members are under a greater obligation to act collectively, and the maximal lineages emerge not only as clear-cut units but also as major social groups of the village. Their most typical role is the duty of the elders in the Viṣṇudevī festival<sup>14</sup> and Mohanī (Np. Dasaī) to perform the most important *pūjā*. In this ritual the central roles are played by the most senior elders (*thakālī*) of each of the several Śreṣṭha maximal lineages, supported by the elders of two Maharjan maximal lineages. Among them, Śr-ML I and II occupy the topmost position.

It is said that the members of Śr-ML I and II are the descendants of the oldest residents of the village,<sup>15</sup> and that maximal lineages Śr-ML III, IV, V, and VI are also comparatively old lineages. They say that Maharjans were brought to the village to serve the Śreṣṭhas. Among the Maharjans, Mh-ML I and Mh-ML II are said to be the oldest and the second oldest groups. It is these six Śreṣṭha and two Maharjan maximal lineages which monopolize important

roles in the main festivals. Also, they (except Śr-ML VI) are the groups called by the names of the wards in which they reside. Among the Khaḍgīs also, most ritual roles are concentrated in the oldest maximal lineage (Kh-ML I).

People of the maximal lineages Śr-ML I and II sometimes say that among the Śreṣṭhas they are *thakālīpī* ('higher people'), *cway cwayāpī* ('people situated higher'), or *thahā wāhpī* (literally, 'those who go high(-er)'), meaning that they have higher status within the same caste. Likewise, the members of Śr-ML III, IV, V, and VI think that they are higher in prestige than other caste members (except Śr-ML I and II) who, they say, are *kwayālīpī*, *kway cwayāpī*, or *kwayā wāhpī* or 'lower people'. Among other castes also, descendants of the earlier settlers who are more responsible in village ritual matters have greater prestige among their caste fellows. These maximal lineages (Mh-ML I and II, Pt-ML I, and Kh-ML I) fill (or filled) all the major festival roles detailed in Table 4.2 (roles 1 and 5 of the Maharjans, 1 of the Putuwārs, 2–7 of the Khaḍgīs).

Today this prestige difference is not expressed in the logic of purity and pollution, marriage or commensality, which are characteristic of the caste system, but is closely related to ritual roles. However, they say that there was a time when the people of the 'higher' Śreṣṭha maximal lineages (Śr-ML I and II) did not eat boiled rice with the people of other Śreṣṭha maximal lineages (including the Joṣīs or Śr-ML X). It is said that they abandoned this restriction after marriages took place between a man of Śr-ML I and a woman of Śr-ML V and between a man of Śr-ML I and a woman of Śr-ML X about fifty to sixty years ago. Nowadays there are no restrictions on commensality or marriage between the various groups of the Śreṣṭhas in this village.

Each maximal lineage is exogamous. As to the marriage regulations, there is a very formal (and Sanskritic) notion that kin within seven or five generations on the father's and mother's sides cannot marry each other. (Informants differ: some say seven generations on the father's side and five generations on the mother's side, some give seven generations on both sides.) But the extent to which the people here can trace their descent is much shallower than the distance stated in this kind of account, which merely gives an ideal picture and cannot be utilized in the practical judgement of the appropriateness of 'proper' spouses. Rather, it is generally deemed improper to marry father's (or Ego's) and mother's patri-kin as long as the kinship relation is remembered to exist and kin terms are used in address and reference. Both cross and parallel cousin marriages are avoided.

The kinship relation with those who do not live close by and do not come to co-operate in ritual and other matters tends to be forgotten rather quickly. This seems to happen more often among lower castes and less prestigious groups, who have fewer ritual concerns. It should be noted that this has the effect of broadening the range of possible spouses for them.

## 5.2. *Phuki*

### 5.2.1. Terminology

I provided a very simplified definition of *phuki* in a previous article: 'the word *phuki* in this village is a term used principally among males who have a close patrilineal relation to each other but live in different households . . . in a broad sense, all the members of the residential family of a person who is referred to as *phuki* can be called *phuki* as well' (Ishii 1987: 338 n. 7). The residential family is generally coterminous with the household (whose members share a common hearth) in this village.

As I pointed out, the word *phuki* is rarely used to denote a group. There seems to be a difference of views among scholars concerning this point. On the one hand, there are those who equate *phuki* with 'lineage' (Fürier-Haimendorf 1956: 27; R. P. Pradhan 1986: 33 ff.; Vergati 1979: 119), 'patrilineal group' (T. T. Lewis 1984: 165), or 'clan' (Herdick 1987: 237). Quigley also translates *phuki* as 'lineage' though he indicates that the word is not used in Dhulikhel (Quigley 1984: 153).

On the other hand, G. S. Nepali does not use the word 'group' to gloss *phuki* ('fukee' in his spelling). 'The members of a "Dewali guthi" are referred to by one another as "Fukee", a term which implies "splitting from the common source". When a Newar says that such and such person is "my fukee" it implies many things' (Nepali 1965: 194). Though Toffin occasionally glosses *phuki* as 'group (of agnatic kin)' or 'lineage' (Toffin 1984: 74–5, 168), he usually explains that the concept refers to 'agnates' (ibid. 168, 647) and in one place clearly expresses the view that one should not interpret *phuki* as a group. 'The *jyāpu* [Maharjan] of Pyangaon did not have a particular word to designate what we translate here by patrilineage. Three words or expressions are employed in respect to this: sometimes the word *khala* (or *khalak*) . . . ; sometimes the word *phuki* which, properly speaking, does not signify a group but rather a relation among the agnatic kin; and lastly, the word *guthi*, . . .' (Toffin 1975c: 53 n. 7; original in English).<sup>16</sup> The expression *phuki khala* is used in Toffin's analyses of Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 74) and Panauti (ibid. 388) to indicate 'lineage'. This usage is not found in Satungal. In Panauti, if the lineage has a particular name, it tends to be called *thar* (ibid. 388).

My observations in Satungal corroborate the characterizations of Nepali and Toffin as to the usage of *phuki*. Though it might be contended that the above differences reflect regional variation, I maintain that what matters here is interpretation and that simple linguistic evidence is enough to prove that the word *phuki* does not refer to a definite 'group' but is rather a relational term. The plural suffix for *phuki* is *-ta* and when the word *phukita* is used, it means 'persons who are related patrilineally' and never 'lineages'.

### 5.2.2. Meaning and function of *phuki*

The meanings of *phuki* are multiple. When asked ‘what is *phuki*?’, people either answer in kinship terms or explain it in terms of obligations to be fulfilled by the people who are *phuki* to each other.

In the former type of answer, it is commonly said that ‘*phuki* means *dāju-kijā*’. Though *dāju* and *kijā* are ordinarily translated as ‘elder brother’ and ‘younger brother’, they actually refer to all the cognate males of the same generation as Ego such as FZS, MBS, MZS, etc.<sup>17</sup> However, when they say ‘*phuki* means *dāju-kijā*’, not every *dāju* and *kijā* is included but its meaning is modified implicitly. When I went on asking, the answer in the next stage was ‘there are several *dāju-kijā*, their sons and the latter’s sons, they are all called *phuki*’. It is clear that *phuki* in this explanation is applied to patrilineal kin only and that its meaning is not limited to people of the same generation as Ego. Thus the equation of *phuki* with *dāju-kijā* shows that the *phuki* relation is an extension of the relation of real brothers. This equation of *phuki* and *dāju-kijā* seems to influence some people’s usage of *phuki*. When one asks ‘who are your *phuki*?’, there are people who only name their own brothers living in their own households. This answer is given by some young men and boys who are considered to have an immature understanding of social relations.

On the other hand, the word *phuki* is sometimes used to refer to every member of Ego’s maximal lineage, even though the maximal lineage is large and includes several subsections—the *dyah pūjā* units discussed below. It is more common to use the expression *bhu bā phuki* (‘split *phuki*’) to those patrikin who belong to different *dyah pūjā* units and who do not therefore co-operate so closely in important rituals as do the members of the same *dyah pūjā* unit. But some old men say that *bhu bā phuki* are also *phuki* and include their *bhu bā phuki* names also when they are requested to list the names of all their *phuki*. Though it should not be neglected, this usage of *phuki* with a wider connotation is not widespread. The most ordinary range of the meaning of *phuki* falls in between the above two marginal usages.

We should note here that there is no word comparable to such expressions as *gmohā* (named clan), *tā phuki* (distant kin in the lineage), or *syā phuki*<sup>18</sup> (the total of unmarried siblings) used in Pyangaon and partly in Panauti (Toffin 1984: 73–5, 389) and that the applicability of the word *phuki* here is not limited to the issue of the common living ‘ancestor’ (ibid. 74–5). The reference of the word *phuki* in Satungal varies according to the context. It is not possible to delimit the range of *phuki* simply by using kinship terms. Rather it should be considered in relation to ritual and other functions.

People often say that *phuki* are people who do everything together. They worship their *digu dyah* together, and offer a shared animal sacrifice and feast together during Mohanī (Dasai). When any household celebrates important

life-cycle rituals such as the boys' and girls' initiation ceremonies, marriage, and the old-age celebration (*burā jākwa*), *phuki* members participate in the accompanying feast along with all their family members (*jahā bhwachī*). All *phuki* members undergo purification rituals after the birth of a child to any *phuki*, participate in *śrāddha* (a ritual of offerings to the dead) feasts, and observe the 'twelve-day mourning period (*jhīninhū dukhā cwanegu*)' for each other.

They co-operate not only in ritual matters but also in agriculture and everyday activities. For example, in the system of *bwalā* (*bolā*) labour exchange, patrikin form the core and invite others to join them (cf. Ishii 1980: 169–76; there has been a tendency for this system to decline in recent years). The extent to which *phuki* co-operate with each other is more limited than in Pyangaon. Unlike there (Toffin 1977: 42; 1984: 75), *phuki* in Satungal do not help each other every day in the preparation of evening meals, and such matters as the repair of irrigation canals and the remuneration of service castes are more the responsibility of other levels of social organization. Where damage to canals is concerned, the level of social organization invoked depends on the extent of the damage. As for the remuneration of service castes, in Satungal this is handled by the household and some *guthis*.

In general, the *phuki* relation is the basis of social identification and control and the threat of excommunication constitutes one of the main factors inducing people to conform to various norms. Fürer-Haimendorf (1956: 30) and especially Quigley (1985*b*: 57–9) emphasize this aspect as the essential function of the *digu pūjā guthi* (association of agnatic kin for worshipping the *digu dyaḥ* together). The situation in Satungal is similar but at the same time different because social sanctions among kin remain implicit; it is rather rare that *phuki* get together for the sake of socio-political matters *per se*. Even the senior member (*thakāli*) of the *phuki* is not active in the mediation of quarrels or the imposition of sanctions in secular matters. Rather, the powers of mediation and sanction are more in the hands of active leaders who have both the personal ability and some degree of social status in terms of caste and kinship as well as in the *pañcāyat*.

Of all the many indicators, it is the joint worship of the *digu dyaḥ* which most commonly serves to distinguish *phuki* from 'split' *phuki* (*bhu bā phuki*). When some households cease to co-operate in *dyaḥ pūjā* (the worship of *digu dyaḥ*)<sup>19</sup> and become *bhu bā phuki* in the eyes of their former *phuki*, at the same time they cease to co-operate in life-cycle rituals and feasts and may also change their mode of mourning.

It is a stereotypical response in Satungal to say that *phuki* are people who observe a twelve-day mourning period for each other, but the actual observation of mourning is based on a different principle from the organization of the *dyaḥ pūjā* unit. In the following, we look into this problem first and then proceed to the analysis of *digu dyaḥ* and *dyaḥ pūjā*.



### 5.3. Mourning periods and kin

There are mourning periods of one year, twelve days, four days, and one day. In brief, mourning is expressed by the abstention from wearing leather, ornaments, coloured clothes, or shoes, from worshipping or touching gods, and from eating such foods as certain types of lentil (*māy*, *bwate*), meat, garlic, onion, salt, etc. Men have to shave their heads ten days after the death of a close relative. During the mourning period, men do not take milk in the case of their mother's death or curds in the case of their father's death.<sup>20</sup> The range of people who are polluted by death and have to observe the mourning periods is said to be as follows:

1 year: sons after either parent's death or wife after her husband's death;

12 days: people whose household heads have a common patrilineal ancestor within four generations of the dead person; daughters and their husbands living within the village (four days in the case of their household members); all the household members of the *twāy* (fictitious sibling) of the dead person;

4 days: people whose household heads have a common patrilineal ancestor between four and seven generations of the dead person; daughters and their husbands living outside the village; sisters married within the village (they may observe it for only one day, as the other members of their marital household do);

1 day: people whose household heads' relation with the dead person is more than seven generations distant; married-out sisters and their husbands; members of the dead woman's natal house.

If the dead person has not gone through boys' or girls' initiation (*kaytā pūjā* or *ihi*), the mourning period is decreased by one step. For example, those who have to observe it for twelve days in the case of the death of an adult observe it for four days in the case of a child.

As seen above, mourning obligations are heavier for agnates than for affines. Unlike the latter, the former observe it in a reciprocal way according to kinship distance. Married-out women have a greater obligation towards their husbands' agnates than towards their natal households. Reciprocally, household members observe fewer mourning restrictions for married daughters than for unmarried daughters. The place of residence of married daughters affects the mourning period observed for them.

It has to be said that while the above states the principle, actual practice often diverges from it. It happens often that people's opinions differ as to how distant given relatives are in generational terms. This is because people do not always agree on how to count generations (they differ over whether or not to count Ego's generation as 'one' or 'zero'), nor do they remember exactly which generation a distant relative belongs to.

If the formal principles are followed, some non-agnates are included among the people who observe mourning for twelve days. Moreover, as most of the

*dyaḥ pūjā* units are very small these days, as discussed below, there are cases in which a certain number of people observe twelve-day mourning but do not belong to the same *dyaḥ pūjā* unit. Even though it is sometimes explained that *phuki* are people who observe twelve-day mourning, it is clear that the range of people who do so does not always coincide with the *dyaḥ pūjā* unit, whose members usually call each other *phuki*. Thus, the meaning of *phuki* is not unequivocal either in terms of specific categories of kin or in terms of the *phuki*'s functions.

In the cases in which people only have shallow genealogical memories, it often happens that, of all the agnates, only the members of a *dyaḥ pūjā* unit observe the mourning for twelve days for each other. There are even cases in which split *phuki* do not even observe one-day mourning. The above explanation of *phuki* in terms of function is more applicable in these cases.

There are differences between the mourning customs of various localities. According to Nepali (1965: 132), who worked in Kathmandu and Panga, 'Pollution is applicable to all the *Fukee* members for a period of ten or twelve days. Affines are, however, excluded from death-pollution.' Among Hindu high castes in Kathmandu, 'if the head of the household dies, ten days of pollution are observed by the dead man's patrilineage but the close mourners (widow, unmarried daughters and married or unmarried sons) observe a less intense form of mourning for a year' (R. P. Pradhan 1986: 207). In Pyangaon, the mourning periods are thirteen days for *tā phuki* and forty-five days for *syāḥ phuki* but the pollution of distant kin is lifted by a ritual of purification on the day of cremation (Toffin 1984: 75). Those who belong to a different faction are not polluted by the death of a person (of the same clan) of the opposing faction (ibid. 103). The last point tells us that the pollution period in Pyangaon is more dependent, these days, on actual social alliances than on kinship distance. In Theco, *phuki* become impure for twelve days (ibid. 197). In Panauti, there are distinctions between *pinhu* (or *pyenhu*) *phuki* ('agnates of four days'), who observe death pollution for four days, and *jhīswanhu phuki* ('agnates of thirteen days') among the Śreṣṭhas, but among the Tāmraḱārs the mourning periods are one day for *tāpā phuki* ('very distant kin'), four days for *sya phuki* ('close kin'), and twenty-one days for *dāju-bhāi* ('elder and younger brothers') (ibid. 389). No mention of affines is found regarding these points in Pyangaon or Panauti. Though information is not complete and is limited to the level of principles, the above tells us that local differences are considerable and that the situation in Pyangaon differs from others (including Satungal) in that agnates' mourning obligations are heavier.

Quigley gives more detailed analysis of the death pollution of the Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas. There the periods of death pollution are: twelve days for household members (of the dead person), ten days for other lineage members, four days for married sisters, mother's brothers, and members of a married woman's natal lineage, and one day for sisters' husbands and children, daughters' hus-

bands and children, and mother's brothers' wives (Quigley 1984: 172). We notice some differences if we compare Dhulikhel with Satungal. In Dhulikhel there is no distinction between agnates as to the pollution period except for the difference between household members of the dead person and other lineage members (hence no mention of the calculation of generations). There seems to be no cleavage between the lineage, the range of people who observe death pollution of ten days, and the *dyah pūjā* group in Dhulikhel. The mourning obligations of affines are heavier in Dhulikhel than in Satungal and the differentiation of obligations in terms of the place of residence does not exist in Dhulikhel. It is clear that the endogamous nature of Dhulikhel is part of the explanation for the last two points. Differences in the organization of agnates dealt with below seem also to be relevant.

#### 5.4. *dyah pūjā*

##### 5.4.1. *digu dyah*

The characteristics and shape of the *digu dyah* in Satungal do not seem to differ much from those of other places. It is a deity represented by stones located outside the residential area. Most of the *digu dyahs* are represented by several stones 20 to 50 centimetres high. Many are of crude stones but there are carved ones also. In one of the latter cases, the central one is said to be Bṛhaspati. *Digu dyah* is said to be the most important *kul dyah* (lineage deity) of the *phuki*: it keeps its eyes on people's wealth and health. If a man is poor, it is sometimes attributed to the *digu dyah*'s displeasure.

Although the *digu dyah* is the deity of the lineage there is not the slightest suggestion of what one finds in many other cultures, that the lineage god is a deified ancestor.<sup>21</sup> Neither the legend about the early settlers of Satungal nor the *śrāddha* ceremony is related to this deity. Moreover, in some cases, the same *digu dyah* is worshipped by many groups not patrilineally related (see below), though all patrilineally related people worship the same *digu dyah*.

When they celebrate (*nyāyke*) *dyah pūjā* fully, all the members of the households related as *phuki* participate in the worship and feast. There are some who invite their Brāhmaṇ or Vajrācārya to conduct the worship. Responsibility for the preparation of the worship and feast rotates among member households and the *thakāli* (the oldest man in the highest generation of the group) plays the central part in the worship. No group in this village has any land donated to its *digu dyah* or any other special property such as an idol or a crown.<sup>22</sup> If *dyah pūjā* is not celebrated fully, only household heads participate, and the worship and feast are very much simplified. There are even cases in which each household head does his worship separately and holds the feast only with his household members.

Newly married wives and new-born children are admitted to the *phuki* by means of the ritual of *du kāyegu* (admission). In this ritual performed during the

annual *dyaḥ pūjā*,<sup>23</sup> the new member circumambulates the *digu dyaḥ* holding a key of the house. Annual *dyaḥ pūjā* is most popularly done on the day of Akṣaya Tr̥tīya around April–May, the next in popularity is Sithi Nakhaḥ day in May–June, and the third is Baiśākh 1st (mid-April). Other days mentioned are Bhī Ekādaśī (Jan.–Feb.), Yaḥmari Punhi (Nov.–Dec.), and some days in the month of Baiśākh. It should in any case be performed between Yaḥmari Punhi and Sithi Nakhaḥ.

There are three, eight, and two stone *digu dyaḥs* of the Śreṣṭhas, Maharjans, and Khaḍgīs respectively. Among them, nine are situated in and near a place called Jāhrūcā, a small plot a few hundred metres to the east of the village. The place is said to have been the original site of the village and the palanquin of the goddess Viṣṇudevī makes a short halt here when it is carried back from Baḥkhu (Balkhu, a sacred place one kilometre to the east of the village where two small rivers join) during the Viṣṇudevī festival. Other *digu dyaḥs* are situated to the south and west of the village.

The most important Śreṣṭha *digu dyaḥ* is the one with the Bṛhaspati image found at a place called Dyaḥcā ('god' + diminutive suffix) on top of the slope across a small stream to the south of the village. This is worshipped by seven Śreṣṭha maximal lineages (Śr-ML I, II, III, IV, V, IX, and XII), one Maharjan maximal lineage (Mh-ML XII), and one Putuwār maximal lineage (Pt-ML I). The ancestors of these Maharjan and Putuwār groups are said to have been Śreṣṭhas who married a Maharjan woman and Putuwār woman respectively and though they lost their ancestors' caste status, they have retained their relation with the original *digu dyaḥ* (but carry out *dyaḥ pūjā* separately).

Maharjan *digu dyaḥs* are mostly situated in Jāhrūcā and are worshipped by one or a small number of maximal lineages. No explanation is offered of how patrilineally unrelated groups came to worship the same *digu dyaḥ*. A few groups of the descendants of later settlers among the Śreṣṭhas and the Putuwārs have no outdoor *digu dyaḥ* but keep their *digu dyaḥs* inside their houses in the form of either images or crude stones (in the Putuwār case). Among them, those of the Śreṣṭhas are also called *kul dyaḥ* or *āgā dyaḥ*. Some others, including all the single household castes, have to go to their settlements of origin (Kirtipur, Panga, etc.) for their annual *dyaḥ pūjā*.

#### 5.4.2. āgā dyaḥ

Each of two old Śreṣṭha maximal lineages (Śr-ML I and III) has an *āgā dyaḥ* in a room called *āgā* on the *cwata* floor just below the kitchen in the house of one of its members (not necessarily in the house of the *thakāli* of the maximal lineage). The deity is also called *kul dyaḥ* and is worshipped daily by one of the members of the house in which it is located. The main worship to this deity is done on the last day (Daśamī) of Mohanī. In the morning of that day, all the members of the maximal lineage come to worship at the *āgā*. If they celebrate fully, they sacrifice goats. This is not carried out by all the members collectively

but each *dyah pūjā* unit in the maximal lineage worships and offers the sacrifice one after another and holds a feast side by side with other *dyah pūjā* units in front of the *āgā*. No one outside the maximal lineage concerned can see or worship the *āgā dyah*.

Though both *digu dyah* and *āgā dyah* are called *kul dyah* and some *digu dyahs* kept in the houses are called *āgā dyah*, people in this village do not say that the *āgā dyah* is the same divinity as the exterior deity *digu dyah*. This makes the situation different from what Vergati states in her account of Bhaktapur (Vergati 1979: 122). The relation of the two deities differs from that of Pyangaon dealt with by Toffin (1984: 80) in that there is no hierarchical order between the two here; furthermore, the cult of the *āgā dyah* is found only among a limited number of groups in this village, which have no separate temple for the deity. The fact that the *āgā dyah* is more exclusive and the *digu dyah* more open to various groups is common to Satungal and Pyangaon.

#### 5.4.3. *dyah pūjā units and their size*

The group which worships the *digu dyah* has been classified as one kind of *guthi* by most authors and has been called *digu puja guthi*, *Dewali guthi*, etc.,<sup>24</sup> though there seem to be places where it is not called a *guthi*.<sup>25</sup> In this village it is not common to call the *digu dyah pūjā* unit a *guthi*. The expression *digu dyah guthi* is rarely heard in ordinary conversation. People do, however, commonly use the word *guthi* to refer to various ritual organizations.<sup>26</sup> A few young men used the terms *dyah pūjā guthi* and *dewālī guthi* in their explanation to me but many people answered in the negative when asked whether they could use the word *guthi* for the group of kin who worship the *digu dyah* together.

I use the expression '*dyah pūjā unit*' to refer to this group of kin. But we have to keep it in mind that there is no popularly used term to refer to this social collectivity as a well-defined group. What is used instead is either a very descriptive term *dyah pūjā nāpā yāyepī* ('those people who do *dyah pūjā* together'), or just *phukita*. Though the *dyah pūjā* unit shares certain characteristics with other *guthis* as Quigley points out (Quigley 1985b: 14), the fact that it is not popularly called *guthi* seems to have had the effect of making it a more fluid, and in some cases an ambiguous, social group.

There are many people these days who do not celebrate their *dyah pūjā* fully, i.e. collectively, but perform it in single households. In many such *manyāh* (non-celebrating) cases, it is not hard to ascertain the range of agnates (*phukita*) who should co-operate if they are to celebrate *dyah pūjā* fully. But there are a few cases among the Maharjans and the Khadgīs (among Mh-ML IX, X, and Kh-ML III) in which people have not celebrated *dyah pūjā* fully for many years, and have had a low level of interest in co-operating with kin in other rituals generally. In such cases, even the people concerned differ as to the range of kin to whom they apply the word *phuki* (or who should celebrate *dyah pūjā* together). As the collective worship is not performed when *dyah pūjā* is not

celebrated fully, it does not matter if a certain emigrant member does not come back for *dyaḥ pūjā* in non-celebrating cases.<sup>27</sup> If this continues for many years, it becomes hard to tell whether or not such a member can be counted as *phuki*.

The sizes of the *dyaḥ pūjā* units here are very small. Even if I regard those non-celebrating and ambiguous groups as *dyaḥ pūjā* units (including emigrant ambiguous 'members' as far as known), more than 90 per cent of all the *dyaḥ pūjā* units (totalling 73) consist of five households or less. About two-thirds of the total have three households or less and more than two-fifths comprise only one household. Among these single household units, there are cases having no agnatic kin, but there are many who have close agnates but do not co-operate with them in *dyaḥ pūjā*.

In terms of kinship distance, more than 80 per cent of all the *dyaḥ pūjā* units consist of households whose heads are agnatically related as real brothers or first cousins. Among the clearly definable *dyaḥ pūjā* units, there is only one case which comprises more than six households and includes relations (of the household heads) more distant than first cousins.

#### 5.4.4. Fission of *dyaḥ pūjā* units

It has not been rare for some members of *dyaḥ pūjā* units to be on bad terms with other members and to split from their original association. The reasons vary from a trifling quarrel over alcohol in a feast to politico-economic concerns. In one case, a Maharjan man who had lost his father in childhood came to know that his uncle had sold his share of land; he therefore left his original *dyaḥ pūjā* unit which included his uncle and the latter's cousin. In another case, a Maharjan *dyaḥ pūjā* unit split because of a quarrel over a Maharjan's role as messenger for a Śreṣṭha and the accompanying tenancy right. It is said that the Śreṣṭha had been receiving the messenger's service from this Maharjan and allowing him to utilize a small portion of land. He later refused to let the Maharjan serve as his messenger and resumed the land because of the latter's failure to pay the land rent. The Śreṣṭha installed the Maharjan's uncle as his messenger and let him cultivate the land instead. The Maharjan opposed this without success, quarrelled with his uncle, and quit his *dyaḥ pūjā* group. Besides such disputes between men, it is quite common for people to say that splits of *dyaḥ pūjā* units are caused by quarrels between women, just like many cases of household fission.

As the splits occur for various reasons, it sometimes happens that nearer kin split off leaving more distant kin in the original *dyaḥ pūjā* unit. In this kind of case, a *dyaḥ pūjā* unit may not always consist of the nearest possible kin but instead may show more diversity, reflecting complex human relations.

There are authors such as Fürer-Haimendorf (1956: 29) and Toffin (1984: 198) who claim that fission in the *digu pūjā guthi* is a normal process occurring in every generation.<sup>28</sup> Toffin at the same time thinks that new kinds of disharmony have speeded up the fission of *digu dyaḥ* units these days in Theco (ibid.

198). In Satungal, however, I could not find any evidence of a 'normal' split of the *dyah pūjā* unit. Villagers here are unanimous that fission always takes place because of some kind of quarrel. As such, the split of a *dyah pūjā* unit is considered something undesirable, at least in principle. It should not split but in actuality it does. The conflicts which arise between people can only be alleviated by separating them from each other socially.

In Dhulikhel, the *dyah pūjā guthi* is coextensive with the patrilineage which comprises all the agnates (except for a few cases which split recently) (Quigley 1985b: 11, 30, 42–7). Based on such data, Quigley maintains, against Fürer-Haimendorf, that 'ideally the *deo pūjā guthi* should never split since its purpose is to regroup agnates' (ibid. 48). As far as the ideal is concerned, the nature of the *dyah pūjā* unit in Satungal is closer to this than those places where a process of 'normal splitting' is said to prevail. But Satungal differs greatly from Dhulikhel in that the fission of *dyah pūjā* units has been commonplace.

There have been considerable economic, administrative, and social changes in Satungal, which have increased the sources of individual income. They have made people more competitive in economic and local political matters and lessened the need for intra-village dependence. Causes of disagreement have increased and it has become easier (and sometimes rather necessary) for people to split from those with whom they had previously co-operated closely.<sup>29</sup> This has had the effect of accelerating the fission of *dyah pūjā* units and has resulted in the general reduction of their size. The existence of many non-celebrating cases may also be attributed to the same causes.

It may be possible to postulate a situation in the past in which splits took place less frequently and mainly served to prevent *dyah pūjā* units from becoming too large. But, as far as we can judge from the present situation, it is difficult to think that splits ever occurred regularly. It also seems unlikely that splits in this village could ever have happened without some kind of quarrel serving as a trigger.

### 5.5. Agnates and the *digu dyah* worshipping group

The ways agnates are organized in Newar society vary considerably. When we concentrate on the relation between agnates and the *digu dyah* worshipping group we can distinguish the following three types:

1. Cases in which a *digu dyah* worshipping group comprises the maximal range of agnates (or more). Examples of this are: Pyangaon, where one or two clans constituted a *digu dyah guthi*, though there has been a division into factions in recent years;<sup>30</sup> Dhulikhel, where there seems to have been no split in the *dyah pūjā guthi* until recently (Quigley 1985b: 42–8);<sup>31</sup> and the Kumā caste in Bhaktapur, among whom several lineages of the same caste may associate for the collective annual celebration of the *digu dyah pūjā* and are collectively called *digu pūjā guthi* (Vergati 1979: 122).

2. Cases in which a clan or a maximal lineage comprises one or more *digu dyah* worshipping group(s). They are divided into two sub-types:

2(a) Cases in which fission of *digu dyah* worshipping groups is said to be a normal process. They include Kathmandu Mānandhars (and others?) (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 29) and Theco (Maharjan) (Toffin 1984: 198). No concrete case of normal fission has been reported and it seems likely that splits do not take place so regularly as to follow every birth (or initiation?) of the first child of a new generation, or every household split. But there may be situations in which *digu dyah* worshipping groups are kept at a middle range size by means of some mechanism which allows them to split occasionally.

2(b) Cases in which the fission of *digu dyah* worshipping groups is not regular but nevertheless takes place occasionally. Satungal offers one example. The situation in Panauti in this respect does not seem very different (Toffin 1984: 389).

3. Cases of some castes in towns in which the worship of the *digu dyah* is performed by individual households. Quigley briefly refers to this phenomenon in the case of some of the higher castes in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, and says that 'this is a recent development . . . and is largely a result of disparities of wealth arising from modernisation' (Quigley 1985b: 14).

The few cases of splits in Pyangaon and Dhulikhel may be interpreted as one small step from type (1) to type (2). In Satungal as well as in Panauti (Toffin 1984: 389) there are households which perform *dyah pūjā* individually and they seem to be on the way from type (2) to type (3). These examples tell us that the tendency for the decline of co-operation between agnates is widespread. At the same time, they suggest that if we trace many of the above examples back to their original form, they may correspond to type (1).

## 6. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can point out that there are many aspects which the village dealt with here shares with other Newar communities. Notable among these are: the important social role played by caste and kinship, the high ritual orientation seen in many aspects of this society, and the existence of plural social layers. The last point has been noted by scholars under various expressions: 'the ramification into a large number of small and closely knit social units' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 36); 'essentially segmental form' (Toffin 1984: 203); 'a Chinese box type of organisation' (Quigley 1984: 203). In spite of all the similarities, the nature as well as the appellation of each layer and its internal organization in a particular locality differ considerably from those in other places. The recent trend towards change has added to the complexities.

Affinal relations show more diversity. Whereas there are cases in which affinal relations are characterized by frequent prestations and co-operation,



there are also cases in which such close contacts are absent. Though affinal prestations and co-operation may be organized in a symmetric way, there are more cases, including Satungal, in which they are asymmetric. Even within such a type there is great diversity between different communities and different castes with regard to such aspects as the role and behaviour of the son-in-law.

As for the importance of residence and territoriality, we have seen that the agglomeration of patrikin has been important traditionally. On the other hand, we proposed to modify the notion that the Newars marry within a very limited area. This is directly related to the fact that affinal relations in the area dealt with are formed across village boundaries to a large extent. It was also shown briefly that social relations extend beyond the village in terms of the inter-caste division of roles. Even intra-caste organizations must extend beyond the village boundary in the cases of minority castes. Still, the problem of territoriality should be reconsidered in a synthetic way taking into account such factors as political power and the various socio-ritual organizations such as the village festival, village feast, and funeral organizations.<sup>32</sup>

It has also been pointed out above that the usage of indigenous terms is quite diverse as well as equivocal. Even the meanings of the terms which are crucial to the society are not unitary but are interpreted differently by the different people. Differences in the way various castes and intra-caste groups operate the same institutions have also been found to be considerable in many respects, as well as being different from the situations reported by other authors.

As seen at the beginning of this paper, there is a great difference of opinion about the role played by the caste system in rural Newar society; Toffin minimizes it but Quigley thinks it pervasive (see Ch. 10; cf. Webster 1993). This difference is more related to interpretation and perspective than to facts. True, if we look at things from the aspect of social identity like Quigley, all of kinship, marriage, *guthi*, and residence are tied to caste hierarchy and separation. But if we pay attention to the internal organization of each caste, it is also true that there are some important elements not necessarily indispensable to the caste system. Such elements as the system of rotation and the emphasis on seniority, so important in the intra-caste structure of the Newars, are examples. In this way, it is probable that caste principles would appear more important in Pyangaon if we were to analyse its residents' social identity in relation to castes in other settlements, whereas they are not stressed in Toffin's analysis of the intra-caste structure.

At the same time, the reason why the inter-caste division of roles receives little space in the accounts of Pyangaon and Dhulikhel seems to reflect a factual difference between them and multi-caste settlements like Satungal, at least to a certain extent. Pyangaon and Dhulikhel are both basically uni-caste endogamous settlements and they contrast with Satungal considerably on this point including the aspect of inter-caste relations. Though we consider this to be a reasonable comparison, it still has to be kept in mind that presentation and

characterization of materials may vary depending on the interpretative inclinations of the authors.<sup>33</sup>

In the preceding section (5.5), we introduced a tripartite typology by distinguishing two types of rural settlements. Here again, we have a parallel distinction as regards the inter-caste division of roles.

The tripartite typology is also relevant in considering the difference in the extension of marriage areas and affinal relations. On one end of the scale, there are endogamous Pyangaon and Dhulikhel where affinal relations are mostly seen within the settlement. In the middle, there are settlements like Satungal which have more extended areas of marriage and affinal relations. The extent differs from caste to caste but village endogamy is not the norm. Concrete data on urban areas are not sufficient but existing materials seem to indicate that there is a tendency for local endogamy among some major castes, which is not unnatural if we take into account urban demographic conditions (e.g. high concentrations of the same caste) and the rural-urban prestige difference. This typology does not seem to fit well, at a first glance, with the diversity of affinal relations and some aspects of marriage (e.g. marriage types, divorce, widow remarriage) because of a large difference between endogamous Pyangaon and Dhulikhel as regards these points. But we try to understand it within this scheme by differentiating sub-types.

In short, it is now clear that Toffin's rural-urban dichotomy is insufficient for the understanding of Newar society.<sup>34</sup> Instead, I propose a typology based on the present perspective, which is summarized as follows.

Type 1. Fringe settlements: basically endogamous, with larger ritual groups of agnates, dominated numerically by a single caste, minimum inter-caste division of roles: e.g. Pyangaon and Dhulikhel.

Sub-type 1(a) with simple marriage ceremonies; elopement, divorce, and widow remarriage are common; affinal prestations exist to some extent; the son-in-law has to serve the father-in-law; e.g. Pyangaon.<sup>35</sup>

Sub-type 1(b) marriage celebrated; elopement rare (but was common until a few decades ago); divorce, widowhood, and widow remarriage rare and stigmatized; little affinal prestation and co-operation; much reservation between in-laws; e.g. Dhulikhel.

Type 2. Intermediate settlements: with marriage areas extending outside the village; co-operation of agnates seen to a certain extent; the caste system penetrating the society with its inter-caste division of roles involving castes outside the village (this aspect has been declining recently); marriage celebrated in many cases; divorce infrequent; widow remarriage occurs in roughly 50 per cent of cases where the woman is still of marriageable age; affinal prestations and co-operation based on the principle of generalized reciprocity; relations between in-laws vary (namely, characterized by reservation among high castes and by intimacy among other castes); e.g. Satungal.

Many of the settlements in the Kathmandu Valley, excluding large cities, may be included here. It seems more appropriate to put Panauti in this type rather than in Type 3, at least from the present perspective. Settlements such as Theco and Sunakothi mainly inhabited by one caste may form a separate sub-type.

Type 3. Large urban settlements: (for at least some important castes) endogamous; with agnates' co-operation considerably in decline; with a complex caste system, though inter-caste division of roles is waning (cf. Rosser 1966: 105–38); marriage celebrated; divorce and widow remarriage infrequent and stigmatized; according to some authors the possibility of anagamy exists; complex affinal prestations in many castes; reservation between in-laws among high castes; e.g. populous cities like Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur.

Organizations of agnatic kin of various castes of different settlements were much more similar before the inception of recent rapid change. Different reactions to this recent change have led to quite different rates of agnatic fission and resulted in different types of agnatic organization.

However, it is difficult to interpret other social aspects in the same way; we cannot admit that endogamy is (and was) also the norm in the localities of the 'intermediate' area nor that the unimportance of inter-caste service relations is (or was) their common feature. Nor should we assume that simple marriage types, elopement, and divorce were common in all the communities dealt with here. More historical and ethnographic data are needed in order to make a persuasive reconstruction and generalization on these points. At the present stage of research, what can be said is that the intermediate type (Type 2) and the urban type (Type 3) are the more common types of Newar settlements, whereas the fringe type (Type 1) is rather marginal.

The marginality of the latter is social as well as geographical, as Pyangaon and Dhulikhel are not only situated on the periphery of the Kathmandu Valley but the positions of Swāgumi (Pyangaon residents) and Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas are marginal and they are usually considered lower by members of the castes they claim to belong to (Toffin 1977: 8, 36; Quigley 1984: 46–8). However, their relations with the groups they identify themselves with differ in a significant way: Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas, who engage in commerce to a large extent and claim to be a high caste, have Sanskritized their way of life as seen in the disappearance of the custom of elopement and the prevalence of marriage customs similar to urban areas. On the other hand, the Swāgumi of Pyangaon, who are largely agricultural, seem to have preserved many of their own customs which differ from those of other Newars. Put another way, what matters is an ethnic assimilation in the case of the Swāgumi, but an assimilation to a high caste and hence Sanskritization in the case of Dhulikhel Śreṣṭhas.

It will be necessary to discuss urbanization and Sanskritization in a broader sense in order to explain the differences between Type 2 and Type 3, but I will leave these issues to other chapters and future studies. Suffice it to say here that

it is not possible to understand Newar society fully without an extensive knowledge of the 'intermediate settlements' of Type 2.

### Notes

I express my sincere thanks to the editors of this volume, D. N. Gellner and D. Quigley, who went through an earlier draft and made a number of valuable comments both on substance and on English style.

1. I have used a fictitious village name ('Satepa') and fictitious ward names in my previous articles. However, I judge the use of real names inevitable in the present chapter, especially because an analysis of the marriage area is included.

Fieldwork was carried out in 1970–2, for short periods in 1977–9, in 1984, and in 1989, mostly financed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, to which I am grateful.

I spell the names of well-known villages and towns without any diacritical marks except in Tables 4.4 and 4.5. Other local terms are spelled with them.

2. See Müller-Böcker (1988: 28–9) for the breakdown of various Newar settlements by caste. For the population of Dhulikhel, see Quigley (1984: 77).
3. In addition there are several recent immigrants (including non-Newars) who are not much involved in the social life of the village. For more detail see Ishii (1980 and 1987).
4. Judging from what Nepali (1965: 149) describes, he seems to place *thalthale* in what I call category (2). In Satungal it falls in category (1). When *tahkhāḥ* is served in Maharjan feasts where Śreṣṭhas participate, Śreṣṭhas go there beforehand and cook *tahkhāḥ* themselves.
5. In making the chart, I consulted Dumont (1980: 86). The words *kaccā* and *pakkā* are not used to distinguish the categories of foods in Satungal though their use is quite comparable to my distinction of the foods of categories (1) and (2).
6. *Lawa* is the same word as *lawat* given by Manandhar (1986: 224).
7. B. Pradhan 1981: 58, 62–3. Löwdin 1986: 50, 60, 73, 152. A less elaborate form *niphāku* (Pradhan) or 'Nipākhu' (Löwdin) is also mentioned. Löwdin spells the name of 'the most elaborate form' (ibid. 60) as 'Nyāpākhu'. It is certain that these words mean 'five (*nyā*) *pathi* (*phā*) of load (*ku*)' and 'two (*ni*) *pathi* of load' respectively. Then the proper spellings should be *nyāphāku* and *niphāku*.
8. Literally, 'five kinds of musical instrument' (Quigley 1984: 253). In Kathmandu Newari, 'musical instrument' is spelled as *bājā*. Majupuria and Majupuria (1978: 110) list the names of instruments included in 'Panchabaja'.
9. The literal meaning of *svayamvara* is 'self-choosing' (of the groom by the bride). Though descriptions vary, its core consists of a ritual in which the bride circumambulates and garlands the groom. In many cases, the latter presents ornaments to the bride in this ritual also. Descriptions differ as to several points regarding *svayamvara*. It is one of the 'types' of marriages for such scholars as Nepali (1965: 230), who uses a term 'Swayamvara marriage' (which, he says, is becoming popular in Kathmandu), Quigley (1984: 253), and Löwdin (1986: 50). According to some other scholars, *svayamvara* forms a part of the marriage procedure (Toffin 1984: 412; T. T. Lewis 1984: 290; R. P. Pradhan 1986: 154, 161–2). In Panauti, Dhulikhel, and Kathmandu, some grooms join the marriage procession

when *svayamvara* is performed. This is unlike the traditional Newar marriage and resembles the marriage of Nepali-speaking Bāhun-Chetris (Majupuria and Majupuria 1978: 98–100; Bennett 1983: 73–4). Many authors consider *svayamvara* as an innovation (Nepali 1965: 230; T. T. Lewis 1984: 290; Quigley 1984: 253–9; Toffin 1984: 412; Löwdin 1986: 50, 152; R. P. Pradhan 1986, 160). It is most probable that it was introduced under the influence of Bāhun-Chetris (Toffin 1984).

10. Nepali gives figures of cases of divorce and remarriage but does not specify which castes or places the samples belong to. Löwdin's remark quoted here itself betrays the uncertainty of his assertion.
11. Various kinds of betrothal prestations are mentioned by several authors (Bajracharya 1959: 419; Nepali 1965: 213–17; T. T. Lewis 1984: 285–6; Toffin 1984: 143; Löwdin 1986: 59–62; R. P. Pradhan 1986: 154–8; R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 12 ff.). Many of them are absent in Satungal today; some have ceased to be practised, some have never existed, and some have been simplified or merged with other prestations.
12. On this point, see Nepali (1965: 280), Quigley (1984: 162–3), and Löwdin (1986: 68–75).
13. In Nepali's usage not all the members of a 'clan' are patrilineally related. They are only people of the same caste having the same title or surname.
14. See Ishii (1978) for the details of the Viṣṇudevī festival organization. Mohanī must be dealt with in another place.
15. They are said to be the descendants of the real son and the adopted son of the first settler. See Ishii (1978: 513) for the legend regarding the first settler.
16. Except for this English article, quotations from Toffin and Vergati are my translations from French.
17. In a wider sense the word *dāju-kijā* includes patrilineally unrelated cousins also; there is an expression *māhyā pākhe dāju-kijā* (*dāju-kijā* on the mother's side), meaning that cousins on the mother's side are also *dāju-kijā*.
18. There are expressions such as *syāhpī* (close people) and *syāhpī phukita* (close agnates). These are general expressions and do not denote specific categories of kin as described by Toffin, though the range of their meaning tends to overlap with the most common meaning of *phuki* here.
19. This usage in Satungal is similar to that in Dhulikhel (Quigley 1985b: 12). Toffin refers to '*digu pūjā* or *dewālī pūjā*' in Pyangaon and *dewālī pūjā* in Panauti (Toffin 1984: 78, 389).
20. This does not apply to married women who observe mourning for their parents only for four days. There are some local differences regarding food restrictions; cf. Nepali (1965: 132), Quigley (1984: 172–3).
21. Nepali uses an expression 'the cult of the ancestral deity called "Dewali"' (Nepali 1965: 194). Quigley does not deny this though his characterization is more sophisticated (Quigley 1985b: 12).
22. See Furer-Haimendorf (1956: 29) and Vergati (1979: 122) regarding the land and Toffin (1984: 198, 389) and Nepali (1965: 196) for other properties.
23. Unlike some groups in Kathmandu (Furer-Haimendorf 1956: 29) or in Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 79) *dyah pūjā* here is held once a year by each group.

24. Fürer-Haimendorf (1956: 24, 28, 29) uses *digu puja guthi*, *devali guthi*, and *digu deo guthi*. Nepali (1965: 194) calls it *Dewali guthi*. Vergati (1979: 122) refers to the *digu puja guthi* in Bhaktapur whose relation with *phuki* differs considerably from other places (see below).
25. Toffin does not use the word *guthi* in his account of Pyangaon, Theco, and Panauti in his comprehensive book of 1984, though he lists *digu dya guthi* in his general typology of various *guthis* in the same book (Toffin 1984: 179), and uses the expression *digu dya guthi* in his previous book *Pyangaon* (Toffin 1977: 43). In his 1984 book he does not show whether the term *digu dya guthi* is applicable or not in Theco or Panauti. Quigley uses *deo puja guthi* (Quigley 1985b: 11, 52 ff.) but also writes that informants differ regarding the usage of the term: 'I have been told that for the *deo puja* group the word *guthi* is not used, that it *is* used, and that though it is not used, the group is *like a guthi*' (ibid. 14). Usage in Satungal is on the same lines, but most commonly the term *guthi* is not used in this context.
26. Some of the *guthis* in this village have been dealt with in my previous articles (Ishii 1978, 1987, forthcoming).
27. In Dhulikhel, 'those who have moved away and do not return for *deo puja* are regarded as being no longer in the lineage' (Quigley 1985b: 21).
28. Toffin's data concern the village of Theco. The situation in Pyangaon seems to be different. There Toffin talks about the fission of lineages as a normal process (Toffin 1977: 42). It is a change from *syā phuki* to *tā phuki* which entails the change in the period of the observation of death pollution but does not seem to affect the membership of the *digu dyaḥ guthi*. Quigley (1985b: 48) is misled on this point because he does not distinguish the lineage and *digu dyaḥ guthi* in Pyangaon.
29. See Ishii (1980, 1986, and 1987) for recent socio-economic and political changes in this village.
30. Toffin (1977: 43; 1984: 100–3). Moreover, Toffin supposes that two 'proto-clans' existed (Toffin 1984: 73) each of which might originally have constituted a *digu dyaḥ guthi*.
31. Though classified in this category, Dhulikhel differs from Pyangaon in that there is less intra-lineage co-operation (Quigley 1985a: 35–6). Satungal occupies a place in between these two in this respect. The extent of the commercialization of the economy seems to be highly relevant to this aspect.
32. For these, see Ishii (1978, 1987, forthcoming).
33. Toffin does not deal with inter-caste relations in Pyangaon in any detail in his book of 1984, though he analysed them in a paper published in 1978. This seems to indicate his interpretative inclination to emphasize kinship in Pyangaon.
34. Quigley and Gellner make slightly different typologies of Newar settlements. Both of them include settlements outside the Kathmandu Valley, but as regards those within the Valley, they too make an urban–rural dichotomy (Quigley 1984: 283; Gellner 1986: 109).
35. Bulu (B. Pradhan 1981) is similar to Pyangaon in many respects and, therefore, shares many characteristics with Type 1(a), but the fact that it is not endogamous indicates that it is situated between Type 1(a) and Type 2. The three types I propose are ideal types and it is very probable that other transitional cases may appear if more materials are accumulated.

# Urban Peasants: The Maharjans (Jyāpu) of Kathmandu and Lalitpur

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## 1. Introduction

The three royal cities of the Kathmandu Valley, Kathmandu itself, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur (to which one might add towns such as Kirtipur, Banepa, and Panauti) have more castes, involved in more complex sets of relationships with each other, than one finds in Newar villages.<sup>1</sup> These cities are dominated—culturally, economically, and politically—by the high castes described in other chapters: Brāhmaṇs, Śreṣṭhas, Vajrācāryas, Śākyas, and Tulādharas. None the less, it is arguable that the backbone, or to change the metaphor, the pivot, of these large cities is constituted by the Maharjan caste.

It is the Maharjans who produce the agricultural surplus that supports the priests and nobles, artisans and ritual specialists. The labour of the Maharjans is essential not only for producing the food but also for reproducing the material environment of the Newar city. Their capacity for physical labour is responsible for a frequently cited folk etymology which derives their non-honorific name, Jyāpu, from *jyā*, 'work' and *phū*, 'capable'.<sup>2</sup> Their skill in farming and market-gardening is acknowledged by other Newars and was recognized by early European observers. Hodgson called them 'the best agriculturalists in Asia'.<sup>3</sup> Urban Maharjans are also essential participants in the ritual life and social reproduction of the high castes.

Maharjans fill many roles but their prime self-image is as peasants or agriculturalists. They often proudly refer to themselves as *kisān*, a Nepali word meaning peasant farmer which they have adopted only recently; they consider the Newari term *jyāpu* to be its less honorific equivalent. Others also see them as farmers. Many other castes practise agriculture in one form or another, but only Maharjans are considered to be essentially agriculturalists. Only they take especial pride in being farmers. Higher castes, such as Śreṣṭhas, often feel some shame at farming; they differentiate themselves from Maharjans in various ways, for instance, by refraining from ploughing in those areas of the Valley, such as in Tokha, where this is customarily permitted (Webster 1981: 111). In

addition to their identity as farmers it is crucially important for the self-image and status of the highest stratum of Maharjans that only they may serve important gods in various ways which will be outlined below. Thus the Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī calls them *kisān* and lists their functions as 'carrying the worship materials of gods and goddesses, taking out spirit-offerings (*bali phālnu*) . . . working fields' (Lamshal 1966: 48). From the perspective of high castes, then, Maharjans are often viewed as much as servants as they are as farmers.

We have referred to the whole caste as 'Maharjan'. There are many members of the caste who call themselves 'Dāgol' or 'Suwāl', and indeed 'Maharjan' is not used at all as a surname in Bhaktapur; all these peasants in fact distinguish themselves from the Maharjans. None the less, we refer to the whole caste as Maharjan, except where the question of different surnames is being discussed, since this is the single most common surname, and it would be tedious always to write 'Maharjan *et al.*' We do not include in this groups such as the Taṇḍukār and Vyañjankār, to be discussed below, who call themselves Jyāpu; while they might be considered by some as Maharjan sub-castes, the Maharjans themselves reject this.

Estimates of the numbers of Maharjans vary. One good reason for this is that many Maharjans try to pass themselves off as Śreṣṭhas (see Ch. 3). Furthermore, at the lower end of the caste there are several groups who can be considered as Maharjan sub-castes (in addition to Taṇḍukārs and Vyañjankārs), but equally are often treated as separate castes. Rosser, who surveyed the whole Valley, except the cities of Kathmandu and Lalitpur (where he had to resort to estimates), reckoned that they form 42 per cent of the total Newar population in the Valley (Rosser 1966: 85–6), a figure echoed by M. R. Allen (1973: 5). Greenwold (1974a: 103–4) surveyed the Newar population of Kathmandu and found 23.9 per cent Maharjans and 31.47 per cent Śreṣṭhas. Gutschow and Kölver's figures (1975: 56–8) for Bhaktapur classify more than half of the population as Jyāpu, i.e. Maharjan. However, in Panauti, a multi-caste town of about 3,000 people, Maharjans are almost absent, making up only 4.27 per cent of the total (Toffin 1984: 261).

Thus it is clear that the proportion of Maharjans varies considerably from settlement to settlement. Of the three large cities, Bhaktapur almost certainly has the highest proportion (over 50%), Kathmandu the smallest (23.9%). The proportion in Lalitpur, for which figures are not available, is probably about half-way between, at around 38–40 per cent. The discrepancies between the three royal cities can be accounted for by migration and attendant identity-changes by some. Many high-caste Newars from Bhaktapur, and not a few low-caste Newars who are not tied to the land, have settled in Kathmandu. Maharjans, as peasants, are the group least likely to do this.

As Fürer-Haimendorf recognized (1966: 25–6), Maharjans often live in courtyards in the shape of an elongated rectangle, called *nani*. Other castes



often live in *nanis* too, and Maharjans often live elsewhere. None the less, the *nani* inhabited by groups of agnatically related Maharjans is a typical form. In Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and surrounding areas, it typically possesses one or more Buddhist cult objects (*caityas* or *dharmadhātus*), a well, and sometimes a platform (*dabu*) for dance performances. Somewhere in the vicinity there is always a temple to Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god, and a wayside shelter (*phalcā*) where hymns (*bhajan*) are sung. The open space in front of the houses is used for numerous domestic and agricultural purposes, such as washing clothes and drying grain.

The Maharjans of each large city are settled in a number of broad localities (*twāḥ*), usually defined by their relationship to a given deity (e.g. a mother goddess shrine, *pīṭh*, outside the city, or a Buddhist *stūpa*). There are often recognized elders of this broad area, either the heads of important *guthis*, or simply the five oldest men of the locality,<sup>4</sup> who may optionally be invited by local Maharjans for feasts on important ritual occasions. In Kathmandu there is a traditional list of thirty-two Maharjan localities, with twenty-eight actually functioning (see appendix to this chapter). Within these localities, smaller ones are also often recognized; these are also defined by their relationship to a specific local deity (e.g. a Gaṇeśa, *chṛwāsā ajimā*, or Nāsadyaḥ).

There are no differences in agricultural work practices between Maharjans of the cities and those of the villages (though the former are better placed to take advantage of the new economic opportunities in commerce, education, artisan crafts, and wage labour).<sup>5</sup> The differences between urban and rural Maharjans are social and cultural. Maharjans of the cities consider themselves superior to those of the villages and rarely intermarry with them (see Ch. 4, pp. 125–6). Between cities marriage is also rare. Maharjans of Bhaktapur, being more Hinduized, consider themselves superior to those in Kathmandu and Lalitpur. Indeed they do not accept that Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are of higher status than themselves (Nepali 1965: 208), whereas Maharjans of Kathmandu and Lalitpur accept them unambiguously as *bhājupī*, i.e. respectable high castes.

## 2. *Hierarchy and Cultural Identity*

It is remarkable that although nearly all other Newar castes or caste sub-groups have a myth which traces their origin to somewhere else, usually India, the Maharjans have no such myth. Even at the level of the sub-caste within one city there appear to be no such myths. As distinct from this, specific lineages do of course often have traditions which record their migration from some other place within the Valley.<sup>6</sup> Thus, not claiming to come from outside, the Maharjans may be seen as the true locals. This has led some observers to see them as descendants of the original inhabitants of the Valley and to look for ancient survivals in their culture and social practices. An example of this type



PLATE 10. Maharjan women, in their traditional black saris (*hāku parsi*) and shawls, make offerings in front of the temple of Mahālakṣmī, south of Lalitpur, on the ninth day (*navamī*) of Navarātrī during the festival of Mohanī (Dasaī), 1982. Two Dyahla temple attendants collect the offerings. (*D. N. Gellner*)

of viewpoint is attributed to the Nepalese historian Baburam Acharya, who is said to have argued that the Maharjans were descended from the Licchavis (who ruled the Nepal Valley from the fifth to the ninth centuries) and that the name Maharjan derives from *mahārājan* (great king) (J. C. Regmi 1978: 10).

We tend to think that such arguments have to be made with great care, and are unlikely to be valid in the form in which they are normally put forward. Statements about specific groups' descent from past dynasties, such as that ascribed to Baburam Acharya, are in fact simply continuing, within modern historical discussion, a thoroughly traditional mode of discourse in which Newar castes have tried to establish their status by claiming kinship with bygone dynasties.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the Maharjans of Yetkhā who have the right to be the god-guardians of Wangḥ Āju (the deity Bhairava in Indra Cok,

Kathmandu) claim to be descended from the Kirāti kings of the Kathmandu Valley, a claim intimately connected to the myths according to which the god himself originated as a Kirāti king.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever may be the most plausible position on the question of cultural survivals, it is certain that high-caste Newars today, conscious of the extent to which they themselves are open to outside influences, often remark that the Maharjans are the 'true' or 'genuine' (Np. *theṭ*) Newars. Interestingly, this reverses what was once the primary denotation of the term 'Newā', by which it was understood to refer to the castes now known as Śreṣṭha.<sup>9</sup> In a time of rapid economic and social change Maharjans do indeed demonstrate greater attachment to what they consider their traditions than most other Newars.

In the *varṇa* scheme, which is used by Newars, as by other South Asians, as a way of thinking about their own society and making status claims within it, Maharjans are usually considered to be either *vaiśyas* or *sūdras*. It is interesting, but not surprising, that neither chronicles nor learned informants agree on this. From the high-caste point of view Maharjans are servants, particularly, though not only, on ritual occasions. They do not have the right to take Tantric initiation (*dikṣā*) in the same way as high castes, nor do they have the right to wear the sacred thread. All of these considerations imply that they should be considered *sūdras*. (Maharjans do none the less sometimes refer to their lineage deity, or even another god, as their *āgā dyaḥ*, from which outsiders must be excluded; the same occurs in Bhaktapur: Levy 1990: 309.) On the whole, this is the status position which most high castes tend to ascribe to them. Wright's chronicle (1972: 186) unequivocally states that 'of the Sūdras there were 36 classes, amongst which the Jyāpu [Maharjan] had 36 divisions, and the Kumhāl [Āwāle] four divisions'.<sup>10</sup>

However, a minority of high-caste Hindus, when asked to apply the *varṇa* framework to Newar society, classify Maharjans as *vaiśyas*. The Maharjans' role as farmers, their higher rank than other middle and low clean castes, and their special relationship to high castes may all be factors supporting this judgement (cf. D. R. Regmi 1965: i. 701–2).

A third way of classifying Maharjans, though one even further removed from the modes of thought of ordinary Newars, is to make a distinction between pure *sūdras* (*satśūdra*), i.e. Maharjans, and impure *sūdras* (*asatśūdra*), i.e. those ranking below Maharjans. The former are defined by their closer contact with high castes and high deities, a point to which we shall return.<sup>11</sup>

Maharjans themselves are not greatly concerned with these *varṇa* categories, but this does not mean that they are not interested in questions of status. On the contrary, they are acutely aware of them, and defend passionately their own high status *vis-à-vis* other middle and low castes. Maharjans in Lalitpur give a status ranking as shown in Table 5.1. The groups listed at level (i) are of equivalent status. We have referred to them all as Maharjan and will return to the distinctions implied by the different names below. All four levels listed

TABLE 5.1. *Status ranking of castes who may be considered Maharjan sub-castes, by a Lalitpur Maharjan informant*

(i)	Dāgol, Maharjan, Simha
(ii)	Ā wāle (Kumhāḥ)
(iii)	Vyañjankār (Tepay)
(iv)	Taṇḍukār (Khusah)

*Note:* The informant used non-honorific terms for castes, caste sub-groups, or sub-castes below his own, and these are given in parentheses.

refer to themselves unselfconsciously as 'Jyāpus' and have a very similar style of life. This is why one may regard them all as Maharjan sub-castes or even closer.

### 2.1. Āwāles, Vyañjankārs, and Taṇḍukārs

The gap between levels (i) and (ii) in Table 5.1 is not wide. Evidence from the chronicles suggests that the Āwāle have always been considered a sub-caste of the Maharjans.<sup>12</sup> In Lalitpur some members of level (i) seem to intermarry as a matter of course with those of level (ii). This is also so in Kathmandu, but not in Bhaktapur and other eastern parts of the Valley (Toffin 1984: 232). If the Āwāle of Kathmandu and Lalitpur were ever an endogamous sub-caste, as in Bhaktapur, today they are better regarded as a slightly lower-ranking caste sub-group within the Maharjans, broadly conceived. We think Rosser (1966: 84) must have been mistaken to claim that Kathmandu Maharjans tend to accept Taṇḍukārs as equals, but he was very much to the point when he wrote that today 'no centralized authority exists for promulgating a definite decision' on whether or not groups (iii) and (iv) of Table 5.1 are Maharjan sub-castes or separate castes.

The Āwāle are potters, farmers, and brick-makers. Their non-honorific name, Kumhāḥ, derives from Skt. *kumbhakāra*, meaning potter (Manandhar 1986: s.v.). In Lalitpur they call themselves Āwāle, a Nepalization of the Newari *āwā*, meaning roof-maker or roof-tiler, a name also found in some other castes (see above, p. 47). Inscriptions show that in the past Lalitpur Āwāle took the surname Prajāpati, and they still do so in Bhaktapur and the east of the Valley.<sup>13</sup> The closeness of the Maharjans and the Āwāles is reflected in the fact that high castes often refer to Maharjan families either as 'Kumhāḥ' or as 'Jyāpu' indifferently.

An Āwāle man claimed that Maharjans and Āwāles have separate *guthis*, but otherwise *calay ju*, i.e. interact as equals. Two genealogies collected from Lalitpur Āwāles proved that virtually all Āwāle marriages are in fact with Lalitpur Maharjans. Some Maharjans, however, say that their right to carry out religious duties depends on their maintaining caste purity and not marrying Āwāles. Figures for two Maharjan lineages<sup>14</sup> from Lalitpur, given in Table 5.2, show how it is possible to have very different interpretations of the relations

between Maharjans and Āwāles. The first lineage, A, consists of 13 households and is perceived as *not* having intermarried with Āwāles; in fact, out of 31 in-marrying women recorded in a genealogy, one was an Āwāle; and of 17 out-marrying daughters, two married Āwāle men. All other marriages were with Maharjans. The second lineage, B, consists of 4 households, and is thought to have slightly lower standing because it has regularly married Āwāles. Out of 13 recorded in-marrying wives, 3 were Āwāles, the rest Maharjans. Of 10 out-marrying daughters, 9 married Maharjans, one an Āwāle. In the case of lineage A only one bride was Āwāle, roughly 3 per cent of recorded cases. In the case of lineage B three brides, or roughly 24 per cent of those recorded, were Āwāles. This is the difference between being fastidious about marriages, and regularly accepting alliances with Āwāles.

The Āwāle of Lalitpur are divided into three clans. The largest is known as 'the seven hundred Āwāles' (*nhaysaḥkumhāḥta*), although today they are said to number more than 1,200 people in all. Even so, they are all held to be agnatically related, sharing certain *guthis* in common. However, in 1991 informants said that intermarriage was now possible between them. Mainly, as noted above, they marry Maharjans in Lalitpur, but they also marry other Āwāles in Lalitpur, as well as in Kathmandu and Thimi. Lalitpur Āwāles make only small saucers (*sali*) and not pots. Those from Thimi and Bhaktapur are skilful potters and often practise seasonal migration to other parts of Nepal to carry on their craft.<sup>15</sup>

The big gap in Table 5.1 occurs between levels (ii) and (iii). Maharjans show no signs today of accepting either Vyañjankārs or Taṇḍukārs as equals. Maharjan girls who elope with Vyañjankār or Taṇḍukār men are not accepted as proper married-out daughters by their natal families. This means that they are not invited on the normal festivals, nor requested to perform the ritual

TABLE 5.2. *Frequency of intermarriage between two Lalitpur (Ltp) Maharjan lineages and Āwāles by origin of bride or husband*

		In-marrying Ds-in-law		Out-marrying Ds' husbands	
		Maharjan	Āwāle	Maharjan	Āwāle
Maharjan Lineage A (13 households)	Outside Ltp	3	0	1	0
	Within Ltp	21	0	14	0
	Within own <i>twāḥ</i>	6	1	0	2
		30	1	15	2
Maharjan Lineage B (4 households)	Outside Ltp	0	1	0	0
	Within Ltp	9	0	8	1
	Within own <i>twāḥ</i>	1	2	1	0
		10	3	9	1

Note: One wife of a member of lineage A, a Khadgī, is not included, since the couple left the area.

services normally required from married-out daughters. Both Vyañjankārs and Taṇḍukārs belong to a lower level of the hierarchy where a Khaḍgī woman, not a Nāpit, cuts (or 'touches') the toe-nails (see Chs. 1 and 9). In Table 5.1 the Taṇḍukār are shown lower than the Vyañjankār, the reverse of some scholars' accounts.<sup>16</sup> In fact each claims to be higher than the other. They are certainly close to each other in status, as evidence from chronicles makes clear.<sup>17</sup> Hodgson went so far as to classify the Vyañjankār as a type of Taṇḍukār (Chattopadhyay 1980: 97). They are both best represented as small endogamous castes of an equal rank with Citrakārs, Nāpits, Mānandhars, and others. This is how they were treated in the Law Code of 1854 (Höfer 1979: 137).

Unlike these other small castes, however, the Vyañjankārs and the Taṇḍukārs are not artisans or ritual specialists, but peasants. The Vyañjankārs are a small group almost wholly inhabiting Cyāsa in Lalitpur.<sup>18</sup> The only other significant settlement comprises those Vyañjankārs living in Dhamthali (also known as Dharmasthali, Dhamtwa, or Dhamta), a village an hour's walk above Balaju on the old road to Trisuli. Vyañjankārs living there take the surname Bindukār. Other Newars call all Vyañjankār 'Tepay', also spelt 'Tepe' or 'Tyapay'. They claim descent from the last Kirati king of Lalitpur and this belief is also reflected in the origin myths of Kwā Bāhāḥ monastery in Lalitpur.

It is well known that only the Vyañjankār may cultivate a green vegetable known as *tuki palācā*<sup>19</sup> eaten on Ghyaḥcāku Sānhū (Māgh Saṃkrānti). They are said to have been given this right by King Siddhi Narasiṃha Malla of Lalitpur, who had a Vyañjankār wife; and their honorific name, Vyañjankār ('maker of special dishes', *vyañjan*), presumably derives from this. In the past Vyañjankār households, each in turn, had to deliver on Ghyaḥcāku Sānhū thirty-two pairs of these vegetables to the Lalitpur palace, for use in the worship of Taleju. Local people identify the statue of Yog Narendra Malla in front of the palace in Mangal Bazaar as his grandfather, Siddhi Narasiṃha, with his two wives, one of them a Vyañjankār.<sup>20</sup> One large Vyañjankār clan, from which she is supposed to have come, is still known as the *mahārāṇī khalah*. A Vyañjankār woman said that their low status resulted from the fact that the Vyañjankār wife of the king had a fictive sister (*twāy*) who was a Khaḍgī woman. She wanted to do something for her friend, and persuaded the king to hand over the job of nail-paring for the whole Vyañjankār caste to her.

A Sākya informant related the Vyañjankār practice of marrying their FZD or MZD, of which they are widely accused by other Newars, to their being descended from kings: 'only rulers (*sarkār*) can do that [break the normal marriage rules]'. It is unlikely that they actually marry first cousins; but it is certainly probable that because of their restricted numbers, they have married those they know to be related at several generations' distance in the female line. The Vyañjankārs live right next to the large concentration of Āwāles in Lalitpur, and share with them the main square of Cyāsa. There is intense

rivalry—expressed in ritual, politics, and occasional violence—between the two groups.

The Taṇḍukārs are an interesting caste of ‘plasterers, paddy-huskers and weavers’<sup>21</sup> who would repay further research. Their name seems to derive from Skt. *tantukāra*, ‘weaver’ (Manandhar 1986: 85a). According to R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 98), they used to be specialists in the various types of rice paddy, and he quotes a folk etymology which derives their name, Khusaḥ, from *khub saḥ* (‘knows a lot’).<sup>22</sup> He suggests that the name, Taṇḍukār, derives from the Sanskrit *taṇḍula*, husked rice. The Taṇḍukārs of Lalitpur play the *kāḥ*, a long thin horn played at various important festivals, and at the funeral processions of those whose families are willing to pay for it; in the Bhaktapur region, however, this is done by a group of Maharjans called Kāḥbhujā (Gutschow and Kölver 1975: 57; Toffin 1987: 230). Taṇḍukārs who are not farmers have taken up a variety of employments and many are very vague about what the caste’s traditional occupation was.

One Taṇḍukār family is known as the *nāy gubhāju*, that is, ‘Vajrācārya’ priests for the Khaḍgī caste. This family lives in Konti, Lalitpur, and performs life-cycle rituals for the Khaḍgī of Lalitpur, Kathmandu, and allegedly everywhere else as well, since Khaḍgī are too low in the hierarchy for Vajrācāryas to serve.<sup>23</sup> One story is that they are descended from a Vajrācārya who married a woman of the Taṇḍukār caste and taught his sons the rituals. Whether or not this is true, it expresses their social position exactly. They marry other Taṇḍukārs, although they are said to have difficulty doing so, because they are suspected of having eaten in their Khaḍgī patrons’ houses. Like other Taṇḍukārs they have no right to Tantric initiation or a Tantric shrine. Yet they receive the ritual of Monastic initiation at a *caitya* in the courtyard of their house and those who are going to practise the priesthood receive an abbreviated version of the Consecration of a Vajra-Master.<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned above, Hodgson listed the Vyañjankār as a type of Taṇḍukār. In fact he listed five sub-divisions of the caste: Taṇḍukār (Khusaḥ) proper; the *nāy gubhāju* [whom we have seen to be one family of the former]; the Śuddhakār (Katāḥ); the Vyañjankār; and the Balāmi (Chattopadhyay 1980: 97–8). The last three are today considered quite separate castes from the Taṇḍukār, but it is possible that they were closely connected at some point in the past. The Śuddhakār are a small caste whose womenfolk cut the umbilical cord of children of high- and middle-caste families. Some informants claim that they no longer exist as a separate caste. It is clear that they are, at least, in the process of disappearing, presumably being absorbed into the vast Śreṣṭha conglomerate. The Balāmi are one of a number of small peripheral Newar groups living around the edge of the Nepal Valley (Toffin 1981c: 66; Müller-Böker 1988: 28–9). Perhaps at one time the Taṇḍukār and/or the Vyañjankār were also one of these groups, but have since assimilated to the culture of the large Newar cities. This might account for the fact that some Taṇḍukārs live outside the typical

nucleated Newar settlements.<sup>25</sup> Further research—the collection of local legends and traditions—might throw light on these connections.

The fact that Taṇḍukārs and Vyañjankārs have to make use of Khaḍgī, rather than Nāpit, women to cut their toe-nails and to cut the umbilical cord on the fourth day after birth is a clear sign of their markedly lower status, as we have seen. In Lalitpur there is an old cremation ground (*samsān*, Skt. *śmaśāna*) set back from the burning *ghāt* by the Bāgmatī river. It has four shelters (*phalcā*) each in front of a separate burning ground (*dīp*). High castes and Maharjans may use the largest. Taṇḍukārs, Khaḍgīs, and Vyañjankārs have one each (the Untouchable Dyaḥlā burn their dead separately down by the river). This pattern is repeated elsewhere in other Newar cities.

The Vyañjankārs and Taṇḍukārs are then markedly lower in status than the Maharjans and the groups who can easily be considered Maharjan sub-castes. None the less, it was probably no accident that they were listed in the ordering given in Table 5.1, while other castes of roughly equal status (e.g. Nakarmī, Citrakārs, Nāpit, etc.) were omitted. The Vyañjankārs and Taṇḍukārs are both primarily agriculturalists, not artisans, and refer to themselves as Jyāpu; they are therefore a point of reference (and distinction) for Maharjans in a way that the artisan and ritual specialist castes of similar status are not.

## 2.2. Maharjans, Dāgols, Siṃhas (Singhs), and Suwāls

It is interesting that the informant for Table 5.1 also omitted the composite Lalitpur artisan caste made up of Tāmraḱārs (Copper-Workers), Rājkarṇikārs (Sweet-Makers), Sthāpit (Carpenters), and others. These latter are certainly superior to the artisans such as the Nakarmī and Citrakār. Whether or not they are also superior to the Maharjans is a matter of dispute. They claim to be of equal status to the Tulādhars of Kathmandu (who are definitely and unequivocally superior to Maharjans). Recently the Tulādhar *et al.* (Urāy) of Kathmandu have begun to agree marriages with the Tāmraḱār *et al.* of Lalitpur. The Lalitpur Maharjans, however, still insist that they are superior to the latter.<sup>26</sup>

The surname Maharjan appears to be relatively late. D. R. Regmi (1965: ii. 746) cites one example of the name being used from 1682. Otherwise it seems not to occur: in all the other documents available the title of those of this rank, if they are given one at all, is Bhāvo, just as those of Śreṣṭha rank called themselves Bhāro.<sup>27</sup> This is not remembered today. What the origin of the appellation 'Maharjan' is, remains unclear. The theory that it comes from *mahārājan*, attributed to Baburam Acharya and mentioned above, is implausible. It is possible that it might have been adopted because Maharjans in Kathmandu and Lalitpur all have Buddhist priests and in the devotional stories of Buddhism the idealized pious layman is frequently referred to as a Mahājan. Thakur Lal Manandhar has suggested that 'Maharjan'



derives from *māhā*, used for soldiers in the Malla period (Levy 1990: 741 n. 20).

In the case of the other three common surnames, Dāgol,<sup>28</sup> Suwāl, and Siṃha (Singh), the origin is slightly clearer. 'Dāgol' or 'Dāgu' seems to have been the title of those peasants who specialized in the measurement of fields.<sup>29</sup> 'Suwāl' comes from *suwāḥ*, 'cook'; it is used of those who have the right to cook food for the royal tutelary deity, Taleju, or in other important ritual contexts. 'Siṃha' is a recently adopted title, largely in Kathmandu.

The status of Maharjans as a whole is connected with the services they provide for high castes and high divinities. Maharjans frequently cite the fact that only they may touch the dead bodies of high castes (as cremation specialists) in order to explain why they are higher than Taṇḍukārs and Vyañjankārs. In Lalitpur others proudly cite their role in the Matsyendranāth-Karuṇāmaya festival. These very same criteria are also used to mark distinctions *within* the Maharjan group. Sometimes Maharjans say that only Maharjans, and not Dāgols, may act as cremation specialists (*gmā* or *gmāt*); and we have also heard the reverse. Dāgols, for their part, explain that—though the Maharjans are their equal in terms of marriage and rank—'Dāgol' means 'good/reliable person especially chosen (*bhīmīha lyeyāḥ taḥgu*)'.<sup>30</sup> Thus only they may help in making Matsyendranāth's chariot and only they may climb up the chariot (*ñawā*). In order to fill the latter role they receive a special initiation of Mahākāla which is said to prevent the *ñawā* from falling off the spire of the chariot. Other Dāgols have the hereditary right to direct the chariot, both here and in similar festivals (Locke 1980: 227). The 'brakers' (*ghaḥkū*) of the wheels of the chariot are, however, Maharjan and not Dāgol. They receive an initiation of Bhairava (Locke 1980: 268), no doubt because the wheels of the chariot are identified with forms of Bhairava. To sum up: it seems clear that 'Dāgol' is considered to be a more honorific title than 'Maharjan', but in fact many of those who are, or claim to be, Dāgols actually use 'Maharjan' as a surname; and it is impossible to establish in practice any caste-like division between two groups bearing these two names. They barely constitute two caste sub-groups, in the way that the Āwāle clearly are within the caste as a whole.

In all three royal cities high-status Maharjans are required in important rituals. For example, in Kathmandu the female attendants of the royal Kumārī (*ninīcā*), who also work in Taleju and the palace's main courtyard (*mūl cok*), as well as the (male) staff- (*daṇḍa*) bearers in festivals connected to the royal palace, have to come from two Dāgol families. Another important ritual role filled by Dāgols in Lalitpur is that of the special assistant in Buddhist monasteries; and during the five-yearly Samyak festival in Nāg Bāhāḥ, Lalitpur, the seniormost man of the four Suwā who work regularly in Kwā Bāhāḥ welcomes with his wife all the gods (*lasakus yāye*). Other Dāgol men cook the rice offered to the gods and to the Vajrācāryas and Śākyas in their role as monks; however, their hand has to be purified first, and they wear a handkerchief over their mouth to prevent spittle entering it. Caste purity, expressed through

correct marriages, is widely believed within the caste to be a prerequisite for the fulfilment of these roles. One often hears it claimed that because of a given ritual duty, they (the Dāgols of *x*) may not marry Āwāles, Lawa (half-castes), etc., nor may they marry any Dāgol family which has permitted such marriages (though the latter restriction is very unlikely to be followed to the letter).

### *3. Relations with Other Castes: Maharjans as Tenants and Ritual Specialists*

It is necessary to examine the relations of urban Maharjans with high and low castes, not just in the context of status claims, but in other areas too. Extremely important for urban Maharjans is the relationship of landlord (*tahsī*)<sup>31</sup> and tenant (*mhay*).<sup>32</sup> Müller-Böker (1987: 287) rightly emphasizes that 'in spite of their proximity to each other of the Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley and their similar cultural background, considerable differences exist between their possession and ownership structures'. In general, the smaller the village, the less importance leased land has in its economy. Of the three settlements discussed by Müller-Böker, Sankhu (Nw. Sakhwa), Thimi, and Pyangaon, the most land was leased out to tenants in the large, multi-caste town of Sankhu and the least in the mono-caste, peripheral Pyangaon. Tenants are often of the same caste as the landlord, and may even be of higher caste or different ethnic group. What concerns us here, however, are the landlord-tenant relations between Maharjans and Newar high castes within the large cities. At least traditionally these ties had a number of aspects which were more than purely economic.

These traditional ties between landlord and tenant have been attenuated considerably in the years since the Land Reform of 1964. Although it may not have had its intended effect in regions far from the capital, it has undoubtedly led to a significant improvement in the position of Maharjan farmers. This is evident in the frequent complaints of high-caste landlords: their land yields far less now that their tenants are obliged to bring them only 23 *pāthīs* annually for each *ropanī*.<sup>33</sup> Most importantly, the tenant now has security of tenure. In the past a tenant had to live with fear and uncertainty: he could never be sure he would be allowed to cultivate the landlord's fields the following year. For this reason, peasants have told us, they used to have to be very careful not to take friends along to visit their landlord, lest the friend decide to offer the landlord a higher yield from the fields; a case was cited where a tenant had promised (and had to supply) 3 *muris* per *ropanī* on land which yielded, at that time, 4 *muris* a year (1 *muri* = 20 *pāthīs*).

Nowadays, in addition to security of tenure, if land is sold, the tenant is supposed to receive approximately one third of its value. Two other factors have helped to improve the position of peasant farmers considerably. First,

yields have increased by as much as 100 per cent (on the very best land) due to new types of rice being cultivated.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the tax on land, fixed at the beginning of the century at 4 to 10 rupees per *ropanī* per annum, has been rapidly eroded by inflation and is now very light.<sup>35</sup>

In the past the duties of the tenant farmer were extensive. There were two systems of assessing rent: *adhiyā*, under which the tenant paid the landlord half of all the produce of the land, and *kut*, under which the tenant provided a fixed amount, usually 2 *muris* of husked rice with a little paddy mixed in (*saruwā*) for each *ropanī*. According to M. C. Regmi, the foremost authority on Nepalese economic history, the *kut* system was introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a way of increasing the landlord's yield, and became increasingly widespread. This was evidently harder on the tenant (and informants today point out that *kut*, being fixed, was better for the landlord); but where tenants were able to commute the fixed payment to cash, this worked in their favour, as the fixed cash payment was eventually eroded by inflation.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the *Guthī Samsthān* (the government office which runs land publicly registered as *guthi*, religiously endowed land) commuted many of the payments it makes to individuals for ritual services from kind to cash. Consequently, those who perform them have either abandoned the service or, where they have felt obliged to continue (e.g. in festivals with royal connections) have had to do so at their own expense.

Land held by Maharjans from Parbatiyā landlords seems to have been under the *adhiyā* system: only produce and no ritual services were required. Newar landlords, on the other hand, gave land in *kut* to Maharjans and received such services. Thus the tenant had to provide, in addition to the rice detailed above, 4 *pāthīs* of wheat each year, large quantities of rice straw which the landlord's womenfolk used for cooking, and red earth (*hyūcā*, *hyāūcā*) for mixing with cow-dung and smearing on the floors of the house. A tenant who held one *ropanī* of land had to take away 5 *pāthīs* of paddy once a year, either at Mohanī or at the Matsyendra festival and bring back 4 *pāthīs* of beaten rice (*baji*). A tenant who held more than one *ropanī* had to perform this service at the rate of 5 *pāthīs* per *ropanī* at both festivals. On completing it he would be fed and given one *mānā* (an eighth of a *pāthī*, about one British pint) of beaten rice in return.

The tie between landlord and tenant was close in other ways as well. The tenant was a social inferior who acted out his subservience (*cākarī yāye*). He often acted as a messenger on ritual occasions, carrying invitations to invite married daughters for every festival (*nakhah*), which were as many as eight in a year in the past. All tenants were themselves invited to eat at every *nakhah*. The tenant's wife would act as chaperone during the several days of complex ritual accompanying the giving in marriage of the landlord's daughter. In return for all these services the tenant felt that he had a moral right to the help of his landlord in times of economic or political difficulty (though the extent to

which he received it must have varied considerably). It was not uncommon for tenants to wear the passed down clothes of rich landlords.

The relationship of a tenant with an individual landlord can be contrasted with his relation to a *guthi*, when he cultivates *guthi* land. In this case the services provided are not to an individual but to a festival or a temple. Today, as on other land, the tenant is required to provide only 23 *pāthīs* of paddy. However, unlike land held from individuals, in many cases the auxiliary services to temples or festivals are still required, often with few benefits and little status attached. Indeed the tenants involved refer to themselves, and are called by *Guthī Samsthān* officers, *rakami*, i.e. those required to provide unpaid (corvée) labour for the state.<sup>37</sup>

Those tenants who choose to keep up the ritual side of the landlord–tenant relationship today usually do so because they reckon that the patronage of the landlord is worth having. In other cases, landlord–tenant relations are often very bad. Landlords say that, although tenants were poor and badly treated in the past, the law has swung too far the other way. Where before the tenant had to give 2 *muris* (40 *pāthīs*) of *husked* rice per *ropanī*, as well as all the other goods and services described, today he provides only 23 *pāthīs* of paddy (*unhusked* rice), which fills a given volume much more easily than husked rice; and this at a time when yields are as much as double what they were. For their part, the tenant farmers resent the fact that they still have to pay so much to landlords, though they do all the work and pay for all the new and expensive inputs, such as fertilizer, which the new types of rice require. Young Maharjans today tend to see the old kind of landlord–tenant relationship as highly exploitative, and the only kind of relationship they want is economic and contractual. In the past it seems likely that Maharjans had an incentive to provide the kind of services we have described in order to convert what was in fact an insecure and unstable connection into a more permanent *jajmānī* relationship with moral responsibilities on both sides.

Nowadays, resentments on both sides lead to frequent accusations of cheating, a situation described well by Webster (1983: 154–9). Whereas tenants outside the Kathmandu Valley, even Parbatiyā Brāhman, are frequently unaware of their rights under the Land Reform legislation, Maharjan peasants are fully aware of them, even if they are unable to enforce them when the landlord decides to sell. There are therefore frequent legal disputes between landlord and tenant, either because the tenant has tried to register the land in his own name, or because the landlord has tried to sell the land for development without granting the tenant his share of one third.<sup>38</sup> In many places outside the large cities landowners now choose, as far as possible, to cultivate the land themselves using hired day-labourers (Toffin 1984: 317–18). For high castes of the cities this is not usually considered as an option. Instead, other ways of investing are sought, either by buying urban real estate, or by turning existing land into urban real estate by building on it, or, for the very rich, by buying land in

the Tarai. All the same, those families who can afford to do so continue to keep considerable amounts of agricultural land, just as they continue to buy gold, since these are still thought to be the safest investments.

Although most landlords are high caste, whether Newar or Parbatiyā, this is by no means always the case. A small minority of Maharjans have sufficient land of their own to rent out some of it. To some extent the distribution of land depends on a demographic lottery: a family with large holdings but five sons will rapidly become very average once the five brothers divide up the family inheritance. Where there is a single son, or where land is inherited through the mother because her father had no sons, sizeable holdings may be built up.

We have mentioned above the crucial role that Maharjans play in the temples, monasteries, and festivals which are organized by the representatives of the two Great Traditions, Buddhism and Hinduism. Another reason for Maharjan high status, compared to others in the middle of the hierarchy, is that Maharjan men fill the role of cremation specialists for high castes. In the past all high-caste groups seem to have used such specialists, but nowadays, since they charge several hundred rupees for each cremation, many prefer not to use them (see Chs. 2 and 7).<sup>39</sup> Here again, as with tenants, the increasing lack of



PLATE 11. A Maharjan midwife attends to a new-born Urāy baby, giving a mustard-oil massage in the sun. (*T. T. Lewis*)

deference is resented by high castes. It is interesting to note how certain Maharjan *women*, by contrast, are associated with *birth*, as midwives (*didī aji*). The cremation specialists are associated with the fierce male god Bhairava, while the midwife has a special relationship with the goddess, Hārītī, who is thought to have particular power over children until they take their first solid food. While the cremation specialists are feared, and children see them as boggy figures, the midwife is often resorted to as a folk healer.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. Relations with Other Castes: Maharjans as Patrons

Maharjans do not only provide services to high castes. They themselves replicate the role of patron, though in an appropriately scaled-down manner. They call on the services of priests, barbers, and low-caste specialists, just as other castes do. The Barber (Nāpit, Nau) comes at harvest-times and receives annual payments in kind (*bāli*) of 2 *pāthī* of paddy, 1 *pāthī* of potatoes, and 2 *pāthī* of wheat.<sup>41</sup> Optionally he may also be given chilli peppers. The Blacksmith (Nakarmī, Kau) seems to have received *bāli* from some and not from others. Tamang married lamas come and fetch *bāli* of between 1 and 4 *mānā* of paddy and wheat every year in return for sending the hail up into the mountains where it cannot harm the crops, by means of a ritual involving blowing a human shin bone.<sup>42</sup> In some places a local man, chosen to guard the fields from animals (*sā pimā*), and another chosen to keep the water flowing through the fields (*dhaumā*), receive similar payments in kind.

Traditionally all Maharjans in Lalitpur and Kathmandu had Vajrācāryas as their domestic priests. They still have great respect for them, based on their supposed strict observance of ritualistic rules and their (consequent) magical powers. None the less, young and middle-aged Maharjans often describe themselves as Hindus, not Buddhists; they know that this is politically advantageous, and often display considerable skill in marshalling arguments for this conclusion. A small minority recognizes that traditional Maharjan religiosity has been more (though never exclusively) inclined towards Buddhism. Some upwardly mobile Maharjans have begun to use Brāhmaṇpriests (see Ch. 6); these, we estimate, are those who aspire no longer to *be* Maharjans.

Other Maharjans, though still a small minority, have taken up the teachings of the Theravāda monks.<sup>43</sup> This latter trend can be measured in a very rough and ready way by the increasing number of Maharjans actually becoming monks and novices. While 8 out of 59 *monks* are Maharjans by origin, 23 out of 72 *novices* for whom data are available are Maharjans. Monks by definition are of longer standing. All the novices have joined the Theravāda monastic community in the last ten years. Maharjan representation has thus risen from 13.6 per cent to 31.9 per cent. This contrasts strikingly with monks and novices coming from the Sākya community, which used to be the biggest source of new

recruits: corresponding percentages for them are 39 and 27.8.<sup>44</sup> We tend to think that the Theravāda form of Buddhism also appeals to upwardly mobile Maharjans (including Āwāles), but its appeal is different from that of Hinduism. Theravāda monks offer a more egalitarian form of Buddhism than the traditional Newar Buddhism of the Vajrācāryas, as well as a more genteel and controlled style of religion (when compared to the singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking which are essential parts of traditional Maharjan religiosity). It therefore appeals to the successful and educated who do not wish, or are not in a position, to deny their caste background, but do desire a more 'modern' and 'rational' form of religion.

### 5. Kinship and Marriage

Patrilineal solidarity is very important to Maharjans. A Maharjan man explained that the lineage deity *guthi* is the most important *guthi*, since no one can join it unless they are born into it (or, as a woman, marry into it). Contrast this with the statement of a Śreṣṭha man from Kathmandu that the death *guthi* is the most important: 'if only one has that, one need have no other'. This represents the attitude of many migrants to Kathmandu, who have allowed kin ties to atrophy. In Panauti even many Śreṣṭhas who have not migrated have given up the regular worship of their lineage deity (Toffin 1984: 494). Everywhere it is quite common today for the worship of the lineage deity (*digu dyah pūjā*) to be held in family groups and on only one day per year, in other words, much reduced when compared to the way it was celebrated in the past. By stark contrast, most Maharjans continue to express their lineage solidarity in ritual, and they often do so on two or three occasions during the year.

The manner in which Maharjans observe lineage deity worship can be illustrated with the example of lineage A, from Lalitpur, cited above. The members of this lineage worship their lineage deity on the festival days of Yaḥmari Punhi, Cait Dasaī, and Akṣaya Tṛtiya. The first is the major occasion on which the entire family of all members is present, and it takes place at what is believed to be the god's original site in Koteśvar. On the other two occasions worship takes place just outside the city near the river, and for this only one member of each household is present. The god, represented by *kikimpā*, metal 'leaves' offered on various occasions, is kept at home in the room of the seniormost member of the lineage in a cylindrical metal box, and brought out on the days of worship. Most lineage deity *guthis* have to collect a contribution (*lhāpā*) from each household to cover costs, but this *guthi* sold some land it used to own and runs the *guthi* with the interest on 20,000 rupees deposited in the bank.

In 1989 lineage A split in two after the marriage of one its members. The new bride came from a family which fourteen years before had been part of the same



*guthi*. At that time the *guthi* had split, also because of a marriage. The seniormost elder of the lineage had refused to accept betel nuts from his own granddaughter, by which act he would have recognized her as an in-marrying daughter-in-law of the lineage of which he was the head. (He did this even though the exact relationship between him and the groom was not remembered.) Likewise, in 1989, although no one could specify the exact relationship between the bride and the groom, the fact that their families were known to have performed lineage deity worship together in the past, and that therefore they were agnatically related, however distantly, was enough to provoke a quarrel and split the *guthi*. Nine of the thirteen households did not appear to accept betel nuts from the new bride and thereby acknowledge her as a new member of the lineage. The assets of the *guthi* will be divided up proportionately between the new lineage deity groups.

In Maharjan lineage deity groups all children are ritually introduced (*dukāye*) to the *guthi* after birth, even if still at their mother's breast. In-marrying daughters-in-law are also introduced ritually at the time of the lineage deity worship; their natal home has to send worship materials for this. Once this ritual has been performed the young woman is a member of her husband's *guthi*, and she cannot be accepted back into her father's *guthi*, even if she divorces her husband and returns to live in her natal home. If she dies in her natal home then her ex-husband's death *guthi* still has to come and cremate her.

Urban peasants prefer to marry, as we have already briefly mentioned, within their city. An old Āwāle referred to marrying outside the city of Lalitpur as *paradeśay bihā yāyegu*, 'marrying in another *deś* [region or country]'. Of the 71 marriages recorded in Table 5.2, not one was with a Kathmandu family. Only four brides and one husband came from outside the boundaries of the old city of Lalitpur; all four brides came from areas adjacent to the city (Pulcok, Kopundol, Koteśvar). Consequently there are numerous affinal links tying the Maharjan localities of the city together.<sup>45</sup> This contrasts with the high rate of settlement exogamy found in villages such as Satungal (Ch. 4). Clearly, urban Maharjans marry within the settlement more than Śākya and Vajrācāryas, in fact, more than almost any other group except for such socially marginal sub-castes as the Śreṣṭhas of Dhulikhel or the Maharjans of Pyangaon. On the other hand, one must note that few marriages occur close to home, within the same locality of the city. In Kathmandu, because of Maharjans' unique locality-based organization there (Hollé *et al.* 1993), marriages within the neighbourhood are forbidden, unless with 'immigrants' from another part of the city.

The status of women, the possibility of divorce and remarriage, and the question of Hindu norms versus 'tribal' or 'indigenous' ones are all interconnected and important issues in works on Newars.<sup>46</sup> Many nineteenth-century observers state that remarriage for Newar women was easy and frequent. All that the woman had to do was return (or place under her pillow) the betel nuts



which had been presented to her as a sign that she was now a member of her husband's family. She was then (these sources claim) free to go. A connection is frequently made to the practice of *ihī*, the ritual whereby young Newar girls are married to a god so that, it is said (both by Newars and outsiders), they never suffer the indignity of being a widow.<sup>47</sup> We believe that the ease of divorce has been exaggerated. Different castes have different standards, but even Maharjans, who are often viewed by other Newars as particularly lax, take infidelity, separation, and divorce far more seriously than is usually thought. Unfortunately, although the practices of urban Maharjans are an important part of the overall picture, we do not have statistical data on the rates of divorce and remarriage among them.

It is clear that some rural Maharjans do indeed practise divorce and remarriage with great freedom and without stigma for either party. This is so in Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 120) and in the nearby village of Bulu (B. Pradhan 1981: 71, 74). Indeed in Bulu a woman can divorce her husband and take her children to her new husband's home, and they will be accepted into his lineage deity *guthi* (ibid.). At the other extreme, high-caste Newar women certainly do suffer considerable stigma, both from widowhood and from divorce, whatever informants may say about *ihī*; widow remarriage is even more strongly disapproved of. Associated with the pattern of easy divorce in Pyangaon and Bulu is the practice of a husband serving his wife's parents in various capacities throughout his life, culminating in carrying their corpse when they die (Toffin 1984: 166). This is diametrically opposed to the hypergamous pattern, followed clearly and unambiguously by Newar Brāhmaṇs (see Ch. 6), in which the daughter's husband is served and treated like a god. In the Pyangaon system the balance of prestations circulates in one direction, women in the other. The hypergamous system is asymmetrical in that both women and prestations circulate in the same direction.

As Toffin has pointed out, the practices of Pyangaon Maharjans are close to those of the hill tribes and to those of the peripheral Newar group, the Pahari.<sup>48</sup> The crucial question is: to what extent do other Newars, and in particular Maharjans both in other villages and in the cities, share the Pyangaon system? Toffin's view is that for the most part they do. High castes, who must once have shared it also, have been Hinduized away from it. The Maharjans represent the 'tribal substratum' of the Newars (Toffin 1984: 19–20, 157, 587, 589).

However, there is considerable evidence that other Maharjans, in the villages, do not approve of divorce and their women do not practise it with the frequency and the ease of Maharjans in Pyangaon and Bulu.<sup>49</sup> Although figures are not available for Maharjans of the cities, divorce is not without some stigma there too. While it is possible for a woman to leave her husband and run off with another man (*payanā wane*), if she does it more than once she is likely to be rejected by her natal home. This is a sanction which is certainly feared by most

women. A man, on the other hand, can marry several times in succession, or marry more than one wife, without stigma. Furthermore, probably a majority of weddings occur with an elaborate series of rituals, visits and counter-visits, prestations and counter-prestations by the two sets of affines, as with high-caste weddings, and not by elopement or very simply (without feasts) as is normal in Bulu.<sup>50</sup>

The relations of a man with his wife's parents also contrast with what has been described by Toffin for Pyangaon. A son-in-law is not obliged to serve his wife's parents, nor to carry their corpse after death. If indeed a son-in-law did work his father-in-law's fields regularly people would criticize the latter for allowing this. However it is true that, if the son-in-law is available and present, he will be asked to carry the corpse of his dead mother- or father-in-law. There is also, in Lalitpur, another suggestive custom. After marriage, at the following Matsyendra festival (simply called *jātrā*), the new husband has to go and stay for four days at his wife's natal home. The first two days are observed as a festival, but on the following two the young man has to be taken to his father-in-law's fields.

Thus, urban Maharjans do not share what we have called the Pyangaon system. Ishii's detailed data, presented in Chapter 4 above, demonstrate that most rural Maharjans do not share it either. Nor do they share the Pyangaon practice of expecting a separation from the joint family some years after marriage (Toffin 1984: 112). None the less, it is possible to interpret the customs and social rules of urban Maharjans within Toffin's framework: they would represent, on that reading, a more Hinduized version of Pyangaon practices. The ritualized four days' stay at one's bride's natal home would be, on this interpretation, a survival of the bride service custom found in Pyangaon.

We do not want to reject this interpretation out of hand; but it is important to be clear on the claims and the time-scale involved. The Pyangaon material so richly presented by Toffin may in fact be misleading when used to frame hypotheses about other Newars. If it is accepted that the inhabitants of Pyangaon do not represent the tribal substratum *of the Newars*, but are rather, as seems very probable, Tamangs or Pahari who have assimilated to Newar culture in the last 300 years, they become simply an illustration of the kinds of changes which can occur. They cannot then be assumed to be un-Hinduized left-overs of the Newars' own past and they are not proof positive that Maharjans are the Newars' 'tribal substratum'.<sup>51</sup>

Toffin's argument requires a very long time-scale: simply put, Toffin's claim is that mainstream Newar Maharjans are descended from ancestors who had a cross-cousin marriage and bride service system similar to that of the Tamangs. This must have been a very long time ago in the past, probably well over 1,000 years. Apart from some tantalizing hints (such as the equivalence of MB and

FZH in the kinship terminology), we have no proof; it is essentially a hypothesis about very long-term historical processes. Such speculation may be productive if carried out with caution, but a tribal origin is no part, one must remember, of Maharjans' own self-image. We remain doubtful whether it is relevant for the explanation of contemporary social organization.

## 6. Guthis and Other Local Organizations

All heads of Maharjan households belong to a death *guthi*. The *guthis* are, however, organized on very different scales. Some are small, comprising twelve or so members, all, or nearly all, of them agnatically related. Others are very large indeed, with several hundred members. One of this kind, in Gaḥchê, Lalitpur, doubles up as a *gātilā guthi*, that is, a *guthi* for the annual worship of the Buddhist goddess of wealth, Vasundharā. It is said to have several hundred thousand rupees in the bank to help fund its activities. Another Maharjan *guthi* in Lūhiti, Lalitpur, has 155 members divided into three groups. Since it has no income, either from land or bank deposits, it has to charge between 30 and 50 rupees a year (figures for 1984) to each member in order to buy the buffalo meat for its annual feast, and to cover the costs of cremations.

If a Maharjan's father dies, or if a Maharjan man separates from his father's household for some reason, a common practice is for the *guthi* to approach him and ask when he will enter the *guthi*. He specifies a date, say one or two years hence. The *guthi* then holds him to his word. In his second year in the *guthi* he has to take his first turn as organizer of the annual round of feasts and rituals.

In Lalitpur another very popular form of *guthi*, but an optional one, is the *sānhū* (or *sālhū* as locally pronounced) *guthi*. This is a *guthi* for the worship of Karuṇāmaya-Matsyendranāth on the first day of each solar month (the *sānhū* or *saṃkrānti*). There are usually between six and fifteen members. Membership is entirely voluntary so the members are often drawn from different lineages, localities, and even different castes. Turns pass to each member either once a month or once a year. The turn-holder visits the shrine of Karuṇāmaya where the image is currently kept (either in Bungamati, or Lalitpur, or on the chariot during the festival). He worships and returns with 'blessings' (*prasād*). All the members meet to receive the blessings, sing hymns together, and share a feast. There are also numerous Maharjan *guthis* for the worship of local shrines of Gaṇeśa, local *stūpas*, or other divinities. Very numerous indeed are the many territorially based Maharjan music groups (*mankāḥ khalah*) which play and sing at principal festivals and at members' weddings throughout the year. Contrary to what Fürer-Haimendorf (1956: 33) thought, these are not primarily, or even at all, economic organizations.

Recent work by Toffin and his collaborators (Hollé *et al.* 1993) has shown how such music groups play an even stronger role in the organization of the

Kathmandu Maharjans. All Kathmandu Maharjans belong to one of twenty-eight named neighbourhoods (*tmāḥ*), which ideally are thought of and spoken of as the 'thirty-two localities'. Membership is clearly defined because all male Maharjans must go through a special collective initiation ritual, known as *wāla*, with others of their cohort; in this they spend the night at a specified shrine, Pacalī Bhairav in the case of all the localities in the lower city, variously Svayambhū, Bhadrakālī, Sīghaḥ, Maitī Devī, or Luti Ajimā, for the different localities of the upper city. The boys who do this together come to form an age grade within the locality. (The ritual is quite separate from the caste-initiation ritual of *kaytā pūjā*.) These localities vary in size from 200 to two households (see appendix to this chapter). The large ones comprise many lineages who do not remember how they are related, but all localities are none the less strictly exogamous. There have been cases of localities splitting when a forbidden marriage occurs, as we have seen above for lineages in Lalitpur. The identity of these Kathmandu neighbourhoods focuses essentially on the ceremonial playing of the *dhimay* drum and the special houses (*ākhāchē*) where they are kept. The *wāla* initiation is a preliminary to intensive tuition in the playing of the drum. Thus for Kathmandu Maharjans 'music is obviously an organizational principle of society and residence' (Hollé *et al.* 1993: 32). In Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, where Maharjans have no equivalent *wāla* initiation or special drum houses, the connection is not quite so determining; but music groups are none the less of prime importance, and participation is equivalent to belonging to the neighbourhood.

It can be seen then that, like all other Newars, and perhaps even more fiercely than them, Maharjans display a great attachment to the place in which they live and have their social ties. They defend their locality's virtues against all comers. They also display a high degree of co-operation in work, usually based on the locality.<sup>52</sup> Another measure of Maharjans' attachment to their locality and their traditional institutions is the exclusion of outsiders. Their exclusiveness appears all the more direct because unlike high castes they do not generally have a cult of esoteric gods into which they may be initiated and from which outsiders are excluded.<sup>53</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

It is certain that the Maharjans, like other Newars, are experiencing the effects of social change, even though, for the moment, they appear more strongly attached to traditional ways than many other Newar castes. Their partial emergence from the shadow of high-caste patronage, and from the economic dependence which went with it, is indubitable evidence of the imminent breakdown of the traditional agrarian order. Many Maharjans support political leaders who use a Marxist vocabulary denouncing inequality, landlordism, and

the rich, and espousing the cause of the working class and peasantry: the crucial slogan in this connection is that the land should go to the tiller. Such support for Communist candidates became very obvious in the elections of 1991. Young Maharjans no longer accept unquestioningly high castes' assumption of social superiority. Most Maharjans now acquire at least primary education; even the majority who acquire no more, and are obliged by economic pressures to work, aspire to greater and better education for their children.

Many different types of work are now available in the Kathmandu Valley. Maharjans work as artisans, bricklayers, day-labourers, cooks, and gardeners, as well as in such traditionally high-caste occupations as shopkeeping and office work. Some Maharjans have set up their own brick factories, as more and more of the Valley's fertile clay soil is taken out for firing during the winter months. In these cases the Maharjans are no longer working for others but are themselves overseers and employers of gangs of Bihari workmen and women imported in teams for the season. All these new occupations, either new in themselves, or new in the manner in which they are followed, bring new ideas in their wake.

For the moment Maharjans have used much of their new-found wealth and freedom of activity in traditional ways. They sponsor traditional kinds of ritual and feast. In Lalitpur, for instance, festivals (*jātrā*) have multiplied in which every shrine of a given deity (Bhīmsen, Kṛṣṇa, Gaṇeśa, Vasundharā) is visited, passing through the city in a clockwise manner, and offerings are made at each by a long line of participating women (the role of the men is to supply the women with grain or other substances to be offered). This practice, though modelled on the traditional Matayā (visiting every Buddhist *caitya*), is in itself new. The backbone of support for these new, but traditionally inspired, devotions is Maharjan. Nor have Maharjans yet cut back, to the extent that high castes have, on the number of occasions when relatives should be fed, prestations made from mother's brother to sister's children, or religiously sanctified display put on. Not only are Maharjans perceived as the 'true' Newars; very many (despite the upwardly mobile minority mentioned above) still take great pride in being so.

#### APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5: KATHMANDU MAHARJAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

The thirty-two Maharjan localities of Kathmandu, according to R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 68–9) and following his orthography are:

*Upper town (thaṇnetwāḥ)*: Thā Bahī, Kwāḥbahāḥ, Bijyāpu (Kusu Biyālāchi), Ini Bahāḥ, Konāy Twāḥ, Jamo, Tyauda, Asā, Mayti.

*Middle town (dathutwāḥ)*: Tyāgaḥ, Nyata, Kilāghaḥ, Yaṭakhā, Wāghaḥ, Wātu, Mahābauddha, Dugābahi, Khicāpukhū (Pukhūdyā), Makhā, Maru.

*Lower town (konetwāḥ)*: Om Bahāḥ, JyāḥBahāḥ, Kohiti, Iutu [*sic*], Brahmū Twāḥ, Bhala Nani, Kumāḥ Nani, Phasigā, Nāypāco, Tokā Bahāḥ, Taḥ Nani, Lasakaḥ Nani.

The twenty-eight actually existing Maharjan neighbourhoods according to the survey carried out in 1991 and 1992 by A. Hollé, G. Toffin, and K. P. Rimal (Hollé *et al.* 1993: 60–1), with number of households in parenthesis, are as follows.

*Upper town:* Thā Bahī (126), Kwā Bāhāḥ (84), Kusubiyālāchi (25), Jamo (100), Tyauda (167), Asan/Bhotāhitī Kisāni (17), Asan/Kamalāchi Pilatū (18), Nyeta (150), Kilāghāḥ (185), Yatkhā (150), Wāghāḥ (58), Watu (100), Mahābauddha (70), Dugā Bahī (16), Pukhūdyā (175), Makhā (2), Chwāsālibi (50), Walāchi (50), Māghā (16).

*Middle town:* Maru (161).

*Lower town:* Om Bāhāḥ (84), Kohitī (75), Yutu Nani (40), Phasigā (70), Nāypāco (90), Bakāchē (150), Bhindyaḥ (87), Musum Bāhāḥ (300), Tokā Bāhāḥ (130), Yangal (36).

*Note:* Maharjan households today consider the middle town to consist only of the area around the palace, with just one neighbourhood. The two Asan localities still count as one exogamous *twāḥ*, though split, as do Nāypāco and Phasigā, thus making 28 in all. The five Prajāpati (Āwāle or Kumhāḥ) localities are: Jyāthā, Tyāghāḥ, Taḥ Nani, Kumhāḥ Nani, and Wāde (Hollé *et al.* 1993).

### Notes

1. The present chapter is not the result of intensive fieldwork on the caste being discussed, as most of the rest of the book is. Its two authors collected the material presented here while working on other matters (in Lalitpur, 1982–4, and Kathmandu, 1981–3 respectively); even though Gellner was able to make brief trips in 1989 and 1991 to check a few matters relating to the present paper, the conclusions presented are more tentative than they should be, and leave plenty of scope for further research.
2. G. S. Nepali (1965: 166–7) gives another folk etymology: *jjā* (work) + *pu* (= *puwā*, Np. *tauli*, a type of paddy). N. B. Bāṭī (1990: 5) registers a passionate protest against the word ‘Jyāpu’ than which, he claims, there is no greater insult in Newari. In fact, though often used derogatorily, it is much less so than the low-caste names ‘Nāy’ (Khaḍgī) and ‘Pwāḥ’ (Dyāḥlā).
3. Quoted in Toffin (1977: 61). Cf. the marginal note to Padmagiri’s chronicle (Hasrat 1970: 43 n. 3) where Hodgson calls the Maharjans ‘these most industrious and intelligent agriculturalists who are by far the best *ryots* in Asia’. On the great fertility and productivity of the Kathmandu Valley in the nineteenth century when compared to the hill regions, see M. C. Regmi (1978a: 12).
4. Thus the Ī Bahī area of Lalitpur (Gaḥchē, Gāhitī, Cobu, Om Bāhāḥ) has five Maharjan elders (*nyāmha ājupī*), perhaps an imitation of the elders of a Buddhist monastery (see Ch. 7). Kathmandu localities with their tighter organization generally have five elders also (Hollé *et al.* 1993: 24–5). According to R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 77), once a Maharjan has been through the ritual of the consecration of an elder (*thākuli* [= *thakāli*] *luyegu*) in some circles he is considered able to act as a priest for such occasions as *kaytā pūjā* (lincloth worship), thus making it unnecessary to invite the Vajrācārya, domestic priest.
5. See Toffin (1977) for a detailed description of Newar peasant agriculture.
6. Where this is so, those lineages which are believed to have migrated earlier to the

- present site usually have higher status (e.g. Toffin 1984: 76; Ishii 1987: 338 n. 7, and Ch. 4, above, pp. 139–40).
7. See the table and discussion in Gellner (1986: 139).
  8. See e.g. Anderson (1977: 128), or Sayami (1980: 12–13).
  9. The Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī, for instance, equates Śreṣṭhas and Newars (Lamshal 1966: 88). On the changing meaning of the word ‘Newar’ see above, Ch. 1; also K. P. Malla (1984) and Gellner (1986).
  10. Cf. Lienhard (1988: 146–7), where the donor of a manuscript of the Nāmasaṃgīti, dated NS 1064 (1944), describes himself as ‘Sirimāna Sudra’. From the locality given (Mikhā Bāhāḥ) one can be sure that he was a Maharjan. The presence in the Buddhist community of Kathmandu of the Tulādharas (mostly merchants), who fit conveniently into the *vaiśya* slot, is a further consideration which may sometimes lead both Buddhist participants and outside observers to classify Maharjans as *śūdras* (cf. Oldfield 1974: ii. 133).
  11. e.g. G. S. Nepali (1965: 167), who claims (on what basis it is not clear) that ‘The Sat-Sudra refers to the Hindu Jyapoos [Maharjans] of Bhaktapur, while the Asat-Sudra includes the Buddhist Jyapoos.’ Contrast J. C. Regmi (1978: 9), who includes *all* Maharjans in the category *sat-śūdra* and Abāl [?], Kumāle [Āwāle, see below], and ‘possibly Kasāñ [Khaḍgī]’ among the *asat-śūdra*. Similar distinctions between types of *śūdra* are also to be found in the 1854 Law Code (between enslavable and non-enslavable alcohol-drinking castes), as well as in India, where, unlike Nepal, *śūdra* is sometimes understood to include Untouchables (Höfer 1979: 117–18).
  12. Wright (1972: 186), quoted above. Cf. Chattopadhyay (1980: 94–5).
  13. Toffin (1984: 231), Levy (1990: 81). On the Kumhāḥ of Bhaktapur, see S. Prajapati (1989). They are much more numerous than the Āwāle of Lalitpur or Kathmandu: Prajapati lists 44 lineages (*upathar*) from Bhaktapur, and 57 in the surrounding settlements of Thimi, Nagadeś, Sarasvatikhel, Boḍe, and Lohakilaṭhalī. Until Chandra Shamsher’s time they all met for an annual ‘Kumhāle feast’ in Thimi.
  14. These are lineages in the sense that they perform lineage deity worship together, even though the precise genealogical connection between some member households, though known to be relatively ‘close’, can sometimes not be stated. These lineages are the same as Ishii’s *dyah pūjā* units (Ch. 4).
  15. Müller (1981: 29). Höfer (1979: 139, 142 n. 37) was incorrect to suppose that the Newar Āwāles (Kumhāḥ) are the same as the Kumāl listed separately from other Newars in the Law Code of 1854. These hill Kumāl are the Barāhmu, one of Hodgson’s ‘broken tribes’ (Gaborieau 1978: 88; Toffin 1981c: 45 n. 8).
  16. Rosser (1966: 86); Toffin (1984: 231).
  17. D. R. Regmi (1965: i. 646); Lamshal (1966: 47).
  18. Toffin reports 295 households from a survey in 1977 (1984: 235 n. 28). In 1991 informants in Cyāsa said there were 210 households there.
  19. Toffin (1984: 235 n. 28) gives the cognate form *yele* [= Lalitpur] *palā*. In Nepali it is known as *pātanko pālūṅ*.
  20. Asha Kaji Vajracharya (1982: 107 ff.) has worked this into a long story the upshot of which is that Siddhi Narasiṃha’s son, Śrī Nivās Malla, is the offspring of the *bodhisattva* Karuṇamayā himself, who appears to Siddhi Narasiṃha’s first wife in the guise of Siddhi Narasiṃha just in time to prevent her committing suicide.
  21. Toffin (1981c: 46 n. 9; cf. 1987: 222). They are also palanquin-bearers in several festivals (Rosser 1966: 86; Lamshal 1966: 47). Gutschow and Kölver (1975: 56) are

probably mistaken in saying that the group of castes including Nāpit (Nau), Taṇḍukār (Khusaḥ), Mānandhar (Sāymi), etc. are 'water unacceptable' for higher castes in Bhaktapur. In Panauti, which is both geographically and culturally close to Bhaktapur, they are not impure (Toffin 1984: 279). Levy (1990: 83) calls them 'borderline pure', indicating that *in the past* they were water-unacceptable for Brāhmaṇs and 'many or most individuals in the upper three levels'.

22. Another folk etymology derives 'Khusaḥ' from *khū saḥ* ('knows how to steal').
23. It is hard to imagine how they can serve Khaḍḡ outside Kathmandu and Lalitpur more than very occasionally (on Theco see Toffin 1984: 186, and on Thimi, Müller 1981: 30). According to Toffin (1984: 230), they also serve the Bādyakār (Dom), the Carmakār (Kulu), and occasionally the Kāpālī. The latter is particularly surprising in view of the Kāpālīs' socio-religious identity as married Śaivite ascetics.
24. See pp. 216–18 for these rituals, which in the normal course of events are restricted to Sākya and Vajrācāryas only.
25. Another tantalizing hint in this direction comes from the Pahari, a peripheral group close to the Newars and living on the edge of the Valley. Some Pahari, who are often themselves called Nagarkoṭī, regard the Taṇḍukārs as 'true Nagarkoṭīs' (Toffin 1981c: 46 n. 9). R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 150) implies that the Nagarkoṭīs are in fact, or have become, a part of the Rājbahāk (Putuwār or Duī) caste.
26. For some further details on this, see Shepard (1985), and Gellner (1992: 51–2); cf. above p. 76, n. 20.
27. The earliest example of this dates from 1073 (NS 193). Kölver and H. Śākya (1985: 91) take this to mean *śūdra*, and 'Bhāro' to be equivalent to *vaiśya*; but this conclusion is surely unnecessary. 'Bhāvo' continued to be used up to at least 1701 in Lalitpur (Kayastha 1989: 9; for a 1678 reference see Rajvamshi 1983: 117) and 1771 in Tistung–Citlāng (Rana and Vajracharya 1972: 59–60).
28. Also spelt 'Dongol' in English and *dāgul*, *dāgol*, or *dāgū* in Newari (S. M. Joshi 1987: 270a).
29. Manandhar (1986: s.v.), Chattopadhyay (1980: 93), V. P. P. Joshi (1956: 126a). It appears in the form 'Dāgulik' in a land deed of 1480 (Rajvamshi 1964: 31) but is not otherwise frequent.
30. Though their role as land-measurers is evidently already forgotten by them (taken over as it is by the state), it is striking how this use of the term *bhī* echoes one of the three categories of Maharjan listed by Hodgson in the early nineteenth century (Chattopadhyay 1980: 93).
31. Manandhar (1986: 84a) derives this from old Newari and before that Skt. *tala*, 'flat land', and *simha*, 'lion'. This seems implausible in view of the derivation of the Np. equivalent, *talsī*, from the Arabic *tahasīl* (Pokharel *et al.* 1983: 591a).
32. Either from Nw. *mhayē*, to receive what is due, in which case the Np. *mohī* derives from Newari, or from Skt. *mahī* (Pokharel *et al.* 1983: 1101a).
33. A *pāthī* is a unit of volume equal to about 4.5 litres. A *ropanī* is equivalent to 500m<sup>2</sup> or one twentieth of a hectare. For the Newari names of local measures of volume, weight, and area—still very much in use by Maharjans—see Toffin (1977: 21–3). The Np. phrase *teis* [23] *pāthī* is usually used even in Newari since the laws are framed and propagated in Nepali. 23 *pāthīs* are due from the best quality land, called *awal*. For the other types see M. C. Regmi (1976a: 132), Webster (1983: 146f.), and Toffin (1984: 310).
34. Informants said that on most good quality land the yield is now about 7 *muri* per



- ropanī* where it had been 4 *muri* in the past. Cf. Ishii (1980: 161), B. Pradhan (1981: 95–6), Webster (1983: 153), and Toffin (1984: 311).
35. Toffin (1984: 315, 350 n. 6). The Nepalese state no longer relies heavily on revenues from land as it once did; it continues to rely on customs impositions, to which have been added foreign aid and taxes on tourism.
  36. M. C. Regmi (1971: 86 f.; 1976a: 129 f.; 1978a: 55–7).
  37. Cf. M. C. Regmi (1978b: 504–31). For an account of all the different castes and functionaries involved in carrying out the worship of Taleju in Panauti at the Mohanī festival, see Toffin (1984: 305, 473; 1993a: 109). The participants are paid with shares of the sacrificed buffalo, which is bought with funds provided by the Guṭhī Saṁsthān.
  38. For an example of the kind of legal trick frequently attempted, see Toffin (1984: 321).
  39. According to Padmagiri's chronicle the custom of using cremation specialists dates from the reign of Bhaskara Malla (1700–14) (Hasrat 1970: 83). In the villages of Theco and Pyangaon, south of Lalitpur, certain Maharjans take up the role of cremation specialists for their caste fellows on a voluntary and unpaid basis (Toffin 1984: 146–7, 291).
  40. Midwives claim that they will go wherever they are invited, regardless of caste; but Pradhan has met a Kāpālī woman who was a midwife for low castes, and we reckon this is probably standard among them. Durkin-Longley (1982: 170–8) provides a detailed account of midwives' work, including their healing and recipes for abortion. She came across Maharjan, Kāpālī, and Khadgī midwives.
  41. In Panauti only the Nāpit and Karamjit (Bhāḥ or Mahābrāhmaṇ) receive regular *bāli* (Toffin 1984: 297).
  42. M. C. Regmi (1974) has published a document from 1924 in which the government confirmed one Gombu Dharke Lama of Jawalakhel in the right to perform this ritual for both Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, a right originally granted his father in 1910.
  43. This trend among the Maharjans is also noted by Lewis (see above, p. 79, n. 41). On the Theravāda movement and its relation to traditional Newar Buddhism, see Kloppenberg (1977), Gellner (1986: 128–37; 1992: 321–8), and Bechert and Hartmann (1988). For a more detailed discussion of Maharjan religious identity, see Gellner (1992: 67–72, 79).
  44. See Gellner (1992: 322) and Hartmann (1993: 77). As for *anāgārikās* or nuns, information is available for 70 out of the 73 who are now, or have been in the past, members of the Theravāda movement: 14 came from Maharjan families, 11 joining in the last ten years.
  45. In Lalitpur typical Maharjan *twāḥ* are Dupāt, Lūkhusi, Pīchē, Lhōla, Guita, Hakhatala, Chāy Bāhāḥ, Mikhā Bāhāḥ, Ta Nani, and Gahchē.
  46. This question has been examined in detail in Gellner (1991). See also Ch. 1.
  47. For early references, see Kirkpatrick (1975: 187), Hamilton (1971: 42), and Landon (1976: ii. 240). There is a considerable modern literature on the *ihī* ritual and its implications. See Fürer-Haimendorf (1957), Dumont (1964), M. Allen (1982), Vergati (1982), Toffin (1984: 401–5), Quigley (1986: 86–9), R. P. Pradhan (1986: ch. 4), and Gellner (1991).
  48. Toffin (1981c: 58–9; 1984: 166–7, 418). On the Tamangs, see Holmberg (1989: 65–6).

49. G. S. Nepali (1965: 250) found that in Panga (where the vast majority of the population is Maharjan) only 3.6% of men and 10.1% of women had experienced divorce or desertion. Ishii reports similar figures for Satungal (above, Ch. 4).
50. See B. Pradhan (1981: 58 f.). R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 74–6) describes the elaborate wedding of Kathmandu Maharjans.
51. In a recent article, presenting new data on Pyangaon, Toffin reaffirms his belief that, despite their recent 'Newarization', the inhabitants of Pyangaon are essentially the same as other Maharjans, and he suggests that their settlement in the Valley may in fact have been a *return* to the place from which they and other peripheral Newar groups had been pushed out (Toffin 1992*b*: 190–1).
52. See Webster (1987), Toffin (1984: 317), and Ishii (Ch. 4, Section 4.4 above) on co-operative agricultural labour groups, known as *bwalājyā*.
53. An exception here would be those Maharjans who receive certain initiations from Brāhmaṇs or Śaivite Tantric priests (Karmācāryas) to act either as temple priests or as priests performing some life-cycle rituals for their caste fellows.

# The Social Organization of Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs

*Gérard Toffin*

## 1. Introduction

Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs (or Dyabhāju) are the domestic priests of high-caste Hindu Newars of the Valley of Kathmandu.<sup>1</sup> This means that principally they are the priests of the vast cluster of status groups known collectively as Śreṣṭha, the great majority of whom are traders, shopkeepers, or civil servants by profession. In theory these Śreṣṭhas do not call on other Brāhmaṇ castes of the area (Kumāī, Purbiyā, Jhā, Bhaṭṭa) to perform their life-cycle rituals.<sup>2</sup> The Rājopādhyāyas also act as temple priests in many temples of the Valley, both royal foundations financed and run by the state, such as those of Kumbheśvar, Kṛṣṇa Mandir, Taleju, Cāngu Nārāyaṇ, etc., and private temples, belonging in most cases to lineages, the upkeep of which is in the hands of private individuals. Most Rājopādhyāyas function both as domestic priest (*purohit*) and as temple priest (Np. *pujārī*; Nw. *pujā yāyepī*).

These Brāhmaṇs constitute an almost wholly endogamous caste of about 1,500 people divided principally between the three ancient capitals of the Valley: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. Unlike Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs (Kumāī or Purbiyā) they are city-dwellers. Kathmandu has the highest concentration—45 households—which derive from an original 17. Lalitpur, which is none the less a very Buddhist city, has 43 households and Bhaktapur only 31. In all three cities the Rājopādhyāyas live near to the old palace of the Malla kings.

To these one has to add a certain number of families who have left their town of origin and moved to one of the smaller Newar settlements in order to carry on the rituals at a local temple: Pharping, Thankot, Chapagaon, Kirtipur, Sankhu, Satungal, Tokha, Icangu, Bode, Dhulikhel, Banepa, Nala, Panauti, etc. These Rājopādhyāyas usually consider their primary attachment to be to their place of origin, and they return there regularly to celebrate the festivals of Dasaī and Tihār. A few of them have migrated because of economic difficulties or mixed marriages.

Although they have considerable reservations about considering themselves to be Newars, the Rājopādhyāyas are, none the less, very involved in Newar culture and follow its most specific customs, such as the consecration rites for old people known as *burā jākma*. All of them speak Newari at home, at least some of the time; most of them also speak Nepali, especially to their children. Their dietary rules are more flexible than those of Indian Brāhmaṇs: they eat both meat (but only goat, sheep, and duck) and fish. Taken as a whole the Rājopādhyāyas are educated people, often authors of books and very sophisticated. They belong to the Mādhyamīna school of the White Yajur Veda. Their holy language is Sanskrit but the instructions of their priestly handbooks are usually written in Newari. They are aware of their high moral authority in the eyes of Hindu Newars and keep scrupulously to the purity rules which they are obliged to follow, in spite of the awkwardness of doing so in the modern world. Even today 75 to 80 per cent of Rājopādhyāya men work either as a domestic priest or as a temple priest and many of them do both. But, as in India, it is the ritual status of Brāhmaṇ which is significant for other castes more than the actual practice of priesthood. Thus, the Rājopādhyāya is important in Newar society because of his birth in the requisite group and not because of any specific personal qualities.



PLATE 12. A Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇ directs a *śrāddha* (ancestor worship) ceremony by the river in Panauti. The main celebrant, a Prajāpati (Potter), wears a thread in the prescribed inauspicious manner under his left armpit for the duration of the ritual; he is assisted by a member of his family. To the Brāhmaṇ priest's left is his Karmācārya assistant. (G. Toffin)

## 2. *History of the Caste*

The Rājopādhyāyas claim to originate in Kanauj, in the north of India (Uttar Pradesh), a city with a prestigious history from which the Parbatiyā Kumāī Brāhmaṇs also claim to come.<sup>3</sup> According to some of them, the ancestors of the Rājopādhyāyas came to the Nepal Valley in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries with Harisimha (or Nānyadeva), a king of Tirhut chased from his kingdom by the Muslims. It is said that they were the priests both of the royal goddess Taleju and of the king himself. According to others, they have been in Nepal much longer than that. A myth tells how two Kanauiyā or Kānyakubja (Kānyakubja = Kanauj) Brāhmaṇs arrived one day at Paśupatināth in Nepal. The elder was called Alāsa Rāj, the younger Ulāsa Rāj. At that time there was not a single Brāhmaṇ in the Valley. The two priests began to recite Vedic texts; this pleased the king greatly and he asked them to stay. One of them settled in Kathmandu, the other in Bhaktapur. These two Brāhmaṇs were the ancestors of the Rājopādhyāyas. Another version claims that there were four Kanauiyā Brāhmaṇs who set out: the first three settled in the three cities of the Nepal Valley; the fourth, who is supposed to have been the ancestor of the Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs, left for the hills. According to yet another version, the two Brāhmaṇs who came with Harisimha were the Alāsa and Ulāsa Rāj mentioned above. The Rājopādhyāyas are descended from the former, the Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs from the latter.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of their mythological aspects, these traditions are perhaps the echo of real historical occurrences. The genealogy of a family of the old royal priests of Bhaktapur, published by M. Witzel (1976), contains the name Ulāsa Rāj. According to this document, this Kanauiyā priest arrived in the Nepal Valley in the middle of the sixteenth century and died in 1576. He is supposedly the earliest 'Nepalese' ancestor of the family. However, these dates have to be treated with caution because other interpretations of the genealogy are possible: the original ancestor could have migrated to Nepal in the fourteenth century, at roughly the same time as Taleju was brought to Bhaktapur, or at the end of the fifteenth century during the reign of Raya Malla (1482–1505) (Witzel 1976: 163–75).

In Lalitpur the mythological history of the Rājopādhyāyas is linked to the mountain of Maṇicur and the persecutions they are supposed to have suffered, just before the alleged visit of Śaṅkara Ācārya to Nepal, at the hands of the Newar Buddhists. According to an oral tradition, of which there are traces in the chronicles,<sup>5</sup> the ancestors of the present Rājopādhyāyas of Lalitpur, who were Kanauiyās, were forcibly converted to Buddhism and had their sacred threads torn off. A few Brāhmaṇs, however, managed to run away to the mountain of Maṇicur, in the north-east of the Valley, just above the present town of Sankhu. The Bānre (i.e. Vajrācāryas and Śākyas) chased them up to the top of the mountain and virtually exterminated them. Only ten families were

able to escape from the massacre and took refuge in the forest. Several years passed. One day two holy *swāmīs* stopped in the kingdom of Nepal. They were surprised to find not a single Brāhmaṇ and revealed this fact to the king. 'A kingdom without Brāhmaṇs, without offerings in the *jaggye*,' they told him, 'is inauspicious, ungovernable. We can stay here no longer.' The king was very worried and had the survivors of the massacre of the Brāhmaṇs summoned. Five families agreed to leave their refuge and decided to settle in Lalitpur. When the good will of the king was confirmed in this way, the remaining five families followed suit: two of them chose Bhaktapur, two others Kathmandu, the last one Lalitpur. These ten families, it is claimed, are the founders of the ten clans found today among the Rājopādhyāyas.

During the Malla period, from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the Rājopādhyāyas, or rather the Upādhyāya (Upādhyā) or Dyabhāju as they were called at that time, were the priests of the Hindu aristocracy of the Nepal Valley, that is, of the *chathariya* (see Ch. 3 above), the group which governed the kingdom. The Rājopādhyāyas were especially attached to the Mallas, the royal family, whose chaplains (*purohit*) they were. They also fulfilled the function of priests (*pujārī*) of the goddess Taleju, tutelary divinity of the rulers from at least the fourteenth century and a crucial figure in the symbolism of Malla power. The priest of Taleju sometimes gave the king a magic formula, *dīkṣā mantra*, which enabled him to summon the goddess and win her favours (Toffin 1986: 87). Together the chaplain and king formed an indissoluble pair.

The *rāj guru*, spiritual preceptor of the king and highest religious authority of the kingdom, also seems to have been a Kanauiyā Brāhmaṇ. He sometimes combined his office with that of priest to Taleju and played a crucial role in the kingdom. His office was surrounded by an aura of sanctity and the king had to take his advice on numerous subjects (D. R. Regmi 1965: ii. 438). He came immediately after the 'prime minister' (*cautārā*) in the hierarchical order and could on occasion replace him. The *rāj guru* also acted as witness when the king made a pious gift of land and when there was a peace treaty between sovereigns. As in India the king owed obeisance to all the Brāhmaṇs of his kingdom and supported them with donations of land.

Like many of the immigrants who came to live in the Valley at an ancient period, the Upādhyāya or Dyabhāju became progressively more integrated with the local people, who spoke *nepā bhāṣā* (Newari), a language which is deeply Tibeto-Burman. At the same time they always preserved their religious identity and their status as Brāhmaṇs. In the eyes of the Newars, who were largely tribal, these priests represented in effect the main link with the learned Hindu tradition, the tradition of Brahmanic orthodoxy, even if this latter very soon turned in the direction of Tantrism.<sup>6</sup> They were the guardians of the religious texts without which it was impossible to make offerings either to gods or to ancestors; they were the living incarnation of *dharma*, the Hindu social and cosmic order. They played a crucial role in





PLATE 13. The main priest of Taleju, the royal tutelary goddess, in the Lalitpur royal palace, performs a ritual welcome (*lasakusa yāye*) for the Gā Pyākhā dance troupe (1982). The boar-faced goddess, Vārāhī, can be seen in the background. Although the divinities represented are popularly considered to be primarily Hindu, the dancers of this troupe have traditionally been the Buddhist Śākyas and Vajrācāryas of three localities, Uku Bāhāḥ, Bu Bāhāḥ, and Na Bahī/Nyākhācuk; they used to perform the dance each year in rotation. Initially the first two localities abandoned the practice but it was continued annually by the third; since 1989 it has been discontinued altogether. (R. P. Pradhan)

the process of Hinduization undergone by the Newari-speaking people of the Nepal Valley and their influence was felt everywhere, even in the most remote villages.

It seems that the Rājopādhyāyas did not exist as a caste or even a sub-caste in the Malla period. There were at that time several types of Brāhmaṇ in the Nepal Valley. Some came from Bengal, some from the south of India, and still others from Gujarat, Maharashtra, or from Tirhut. They either came as refugees to Nepal at different periods as a result of Muslim conquests in India or were invited by one or other Malla king for a specific purpose (e.g. to serve as temple priests or to perform a given ritual). However, historical documents, which admittedly are few and far between, make not a single mention of any

caste organization, or of any divisions into different groups of Brāhmaṇs. Nor does it seem that the present-day Rājopādhyāyas are all descended from a single ancestor as legend claims. Rather it appears that the first arrivals, no more than several families, continued to receive reinforcements until quite a late date (at least until the sixteenth or seventeenth century). The present Rājopādhyāya caste is thus more likely to have been the product of the amalgamation of successive waves of migrants than of the fission and separation of the descendants of a single ancestor.

Whatever the truth may be on the question of origin, the conquest of the Nepal Valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the second half of the eighteenth century played a crucial role in the formation of the Rājopādhyāya caste. Confrontation with an exterior power and the Rājopādhyāyas' consequent loss of status were decisive for the development of their identity. Prithvi Narayan brought with him Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs who replaced the Rājopādhyāyas as the supreme religious authority and took over from them most of the lucrative positions. The regime of the Shahs clearly favoured the Brāhmaṇs of the hills to the detriment of those of the Kathmandu Valley, and even, so the Rājopādhyāyas themselves claim, confiscated their land.<sup>7</sup>

These historical events soon resulted in a *de facto* and *de jure* fall in the status of the Rājopādhyāyas. The Law Code, introduced in 1854 by Jang Bahadur, introduced a sharp division between them and the hill Brāhmaṇs, and it reserved the title Upādhyāya for the latter. The former, called Devbhāju, were placed at a very low level in the Nepalese caste hierarchy, far behind the Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs, and even below the Ṭhakurī and the Tāgādhārī Chetri, as if they were Brāhmaṇs of inferior rank (Höfer 1979: 152). This unusually low position for those who had been the *purohit* and *guru* of the Hindu royal family did, however, pose problems for the law-maker. Certain passages of the Code contradict the official hierarchy and presume that the Devbhāju are superior to the Ṭhakurī and the Chetris. Thus, they are exempt from capital punishment, just like Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs (ibid. 152). We should also note in passing that the Rājopādhyāyas are not included among Newar castes properly speaking, who have a section of the Code reserved especially for them: Rājopādhyāyas are discussed among the Parbatiyā castes, as are the Newar Untouchables.

The short reign of Pratap Singh Shah (1775–8) was an exception to this pattern, a brief moment of respite for the Rājopādhyāyas, a clearing in a cloud-filled sky. This king, the oldest son of Prithvi Narayan, was very well disposed towards the Newars because, it is said, he had a Newar concubine, the granddaughter of one of the leaders (*kaji*) of Kirtipur, with whom he was head over heels in love. He was also addicted to Tantrism and received an initiation (*dikṣā*) from a Devbhāju of Lalitpur called Kirtijwalananda Upādhyāya (Rimal 1983: 10). He is supposed to have been the first Shah king to drink alcohol. Pratap Singh was very open towards the Devbhāju and granted them certain



rights. Indeed some claim that it was he who granted these Brāhmaṇs the title Rājopādhyāya, a name which seems not to have been used, or if it was, very rarely, in the preceding period.

### 3. *Status, Power, and Identity*

Although the Law Code of 1854 is no longer in force, divisions based on old cleavages continue. Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs still consider the Rājopādhyāyas as inferior and refuse to marry them. They accuse them of being the priests of Newar castes whose domestic ceremonies are similar to those of *śūdras*; they also accuse them of carrying out heterodox Tantric rites which require them, among other things, to drink alcohol and eat certain types of meat. For their part, the Rājopādhyāyas refuse to recognize the superior status of the Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs: they consider themselves to be either superior or equal to them. They consider themselves, often justly, to be more cultured than the Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs and regard them with a certain contempt as village Brāhmaṇs who have to live as peasants. The two groups do not accept cooked rice or any cooked food from each other. This conflict-ridden situation is perpetuated by numerous financial law cases and political intrigues. The Rājopādhyāyas complain that they have been removed from the kingdom's important religious positions and are now always placed low, or even excluded, when there are big national festivals.

As a result of this, there are virtually no marriages between the two groups. During my research I found only a few isolated cases of mixed unions: four in Lalitpur, two in Bhaktapur, to restrict oneself to those two settlements. In every case it was a Rājopādhyāya man married to a Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇ woman, and never the other way around, since the former are loath to give their daughters in marriage to the latter. These marriages do not lead to any fall in status on the part of the man, even if he eats food cooked by his wife. However the status of the children is more problematic: the elders of the community are in general opposed to the idea of accepting the sons of such hybrid unions as full members of the caste. None the less, wealth or a prestigious social position can help in overcoming the difficulty.

The Rājopādhyāyas do not marry with either the Jhā or the Bhaṭṭa, two other important Brāhmaṇ groups in the Kathmandu Valley. These priests, of Indian origin, have lived in the Valley for a long time, but have never been so deeply Newarized as the Rājopādhyāyas, even though most of them speak Newari fluently. They are basically temple priests and, with rare exceptions who have low-status Śreṣṭhas as their patrons, do not function as domestic priests. The Jhā (also called Miśra or Terhautyā), come originally from Tirhut, and are temple priests for numerous Hindu shrines, both Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite; they also hold public readings, in Newari, of religious texts in villages, an activity

which renders them slightly lower in status because done for money. As for the Bhaṭṭa, they come originally from the south of India; they are temple priests in Śaivite temples, including the Paśupati temple on the river Bāgmatī, and several renouncer monasteries (*maṭh*). The Rājopādhyāyas consider both of these Brāhmaṇ castes to be inferior to themselves. Any mixed union is considered illegitimate (Nw. *mathyā patī*) and results in immediate expulsion from the caste.<sup>8</sup>

In such a small community, marriage sometimes poses thorny problems. Around 1850 the Rājopādhyāyas tried for the first time to establish matrimonial relations in India with the Kanyākubja Brāhmaṇs. Contacts were established but the Indian Brāhmaṇs demanded extremely ancient genealogies demonstrating absolutely pure descent. The Rājopādhyāyas were unable to produce such documents. And then, they said (once their advances had been rejected), the customs of the two groups were in any case different. 'In India, for example, Brāhmaṇs eat in the open air, in the fields. Among us that is strictly forbidden.' '*Jāt milay jū, vyavahāra milay ma jū* (In terms of caste we have the same status, but not where customs are concerned).' A second attempt was made in 1952. A committee was set up, the Kanyākubja Bibāha Sāmānya Samiti, at the instigation of Rameshananda of Bangemurha, Kathmandu. An emissary, Mahadya Baje, of Bhaktapur, was sent to Kanauj, but once again the demand was rejected by the Indian Brāhmaṇs. Furthermore, the matter ended badly for Mahadya Baje. The wily intermediary returned from his long journey with two young Indian Brāhmaṇ girls, whom he married to members of his family. But no one knew where these girls had come from or who exactly they were. Mahadya Baje was suspected of having bought them, and he was expelled from the caste, along with all of his family. This unconventional man had already, some time earlier, taught a Tantric *mantra* to a Rañjitkār (Chipā), a low caste to whom in principle the *dīkṣā* initiation is not permitted; for this reason Mahadya Baje was already on the fringes of his community.<sup>9</sup>

As has already been mentioned, the Rājopādhyāyas do not consider themselves to be altogether like the Newars. They prefer to place themselves outside this ethnic group. The Rājopādhyāyas can only really claim the full status of Brāhmaṇs by distinguishing themselves from the Newars. Like all self-respecting Brāhmaṇs, they embody in effect the transcendental values of religious life. As such they are opposed to the local values represented by the Chathariyā, the Śreṣṭhas, and other Newar castes. The fact that they belong to the Brāhmaṇ caste prevents them from being too closely attached to any tribal group, whatever it may be.

On the part of many Rājopādhyāyas, one senses a willingness to merge into the wider Nepalese culture. Not satisfied with differentiating themselves from Newars, the Rājopādhyāyas today are purposely taking on the clan names (Np. *thar*) of Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs. In Kathmandu, for example, members of the Makhāchê clan call themselves Subhedi because, like them, they belong to the

Bhāradvaja *gotra*. The same is true of the Rājopādhyāyas of the Hwāgaḥchê clan who nowadays add 'Rimāl' to their name, because, like the Rimāls, they are members of the Kausik *gotra*. To justify these pretensions, recourse is often had to the origin myth according to which Parbatiyā and Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs are descended from the same parents.

The Nepali language is advancing at the expense of Newari. I often heard Rājopādhyāya priests using the word 'Chetri' (the name of the Parbatiyā caste claiming *kṣatriya* status) to refer to their Śreṣṭha *jajmāns*. In spite of all the cultural elements which separate them, many Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs today feel themselves to be closer to Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs than to Newars. Brāhmaṇ status seems to take precedence over ethnic identity. It is surely significant in this respect that few Rājopādhyāyas feel themselves concerned by the cultural and ethnic movements which have agitated the Newar community in recent years.

#### 4. Kin Groups

The Rājopādhyāyas are divided into clans, called *kawā* (or *kawah*), *kul*, *khala* (from the Hindi *khalak*), or even *chê* (literally 'house' in Newari). The genealogical depth of these patrilineal units varies from seven to fifteen generations, but only a few people manage to go so far back, and then always with the help of written charts (*vaṃśāvalī*) preserved by the families in question. The average genealogical memory does not go back more than four or five generations in the main line, and three or four generations in collateral lines. All the same, these clans are larger than Newar kin groups, which are characterized by their shallowness and rapid fission.

The clan is strictly exogamous. Any sexual relationship between patrilineal relatives is considered incestuous. The rule can, however, be manipulated, as proved by the following anecdote, collected in Lalitpur. One day a young man fell in love with a girl belonging to his own clan. The elders held a meeting and decided that the mother's brother of the girl (who had no daughters of his own) should adopt her. The adoption was carried out and the couple were then able to get married. In marriage, as in many other domains, social kinship counts for more than biological kinship.

The clans are named after the locality (Np. *ṭol*; Nw. *twāh*, *nani*, or *cuke*) where the house of the oldest known common ancestor is found. In Kathmandu the Rājopādhyāya community was originally divided into two clans: Hwāgaḥchê (Hwāgaḥ = Indra Chok) and Makhāchê, two areas of the old city to the north-east of the old Hanuman Dhoka palace. In Lalitpur the Rājopādhyāyas are divided into six clans: Balimhā, Sulimhā, Swaṭha, Torālipi, Mahādyahnani (= Wālā), and Wanglasimā (the last named being extinct today). In Bhaktapur they are divided into two: Tsutsachê and Ipachê, both to the

south of the royal palace. There are then ten clans in total, a number which, as we have seen, fits the origin myths of the caste.

There is quite a strong correspondence between kinship and residence since sons have a tendency to build their house next to that of their parents. However, lack of space, internal quarrels, and the new opportunities which have opened up in recent years because of the expansion of the real estate market have led kin groups to be scattered throughout the town. Previously, definitive migrations from one city to another were rare and seem to have occurred mainly because of adoptions. Nowadays, the rise of salaried employment has led a certain number of Rājopādhyāyas to settle in the capital. In the case of migration, whether it is to the countryside or to the capital, the family remains attached to the clan of origin, even though links tend to become weaker over time.

The members of the clan consider themselves to belong to the same patrilineal group and to be united by a common agnatic link. The precise expression for this type of kinship is *āgā phuki*, agnates who worship the same clan divinity *āgā dyaḥ* (on which, see below). As long as they do not belong to the same lineage, these *āgā phuki* have only a very small number of mutual obligations. They are not polluted by each other's death; their womenfolk must merely pay a visit to the family of the deceased during the ten days which follow the cremation, taking with them cakes (Np. *roṭi*) and sweets (Np. *miṭhāi*). This visit of condolence is known as *bicāḥ wanegu* in Newari. One should note that in certain cases it is possible to tell straight away from a man's name which clan he belongs to. Thus, in Lalitpur, all the male members of the Wālā clan have a compound name of which one part is *dhar* ('endowed with' or 'bearing' in Sanskrit). This is a source of considerable clan identity and solidarity.

The seniormost elder, *thakāli*, of the kin group enjoys an undisputed moral authority and plays an important ceremonial role. He is invited, along with his wife, to all life-cycle rituals celebrated within the clan. In principle it is always he who is chosen as spiritual preceptor, *guru*, to give the Vedic *gāyatrī* formula on the occasion of the Brāhmaṇic initiation ceremony (*vratabandha*; Skt. *upanayana*) and to give the neophyte the sacred thread (*janai*), the distinctive mark of the 'twice-born'. He also plays a central role when Tantric initiations (*dīkṣā*; Nw. *dekhā*) are held for the young people of the clan. This ceremony, organized on a collective basis, is a purely clan ritual, reserved exclusively to members of the kin group, both male and female. Participation, however, is entirely optional.

It sometimes happens that the principle of seniority, fundamental to Newar society, comes into conflict with the hierarchical principles inherent in kin relations. A severe quarrel broke out in this way twenty years ago in Kathmandu. Rameshananda, a prominent personality of the Rājopādhyāya community of the city, disputed the authority of the senior *thakāli* of the time, arguing that the latter was in fact his 'nephew', a relative who is required by the

general rule to show respect to his uncle, notwithstanding the fact that in this particular case he belonged to a senior branch of the lineage. Rameshananda therefore refused to bow down (Nw. *bhāgi yāyegu*) in front of his 'elder' as clan custom required and instead claimed for himself the title *thakāli*. The affair was brought to various lawcourts whose officials prudently refused to give a judgement. The quarrel caused a schism within the community which even today is still not healed.

Clans with a large number of members are divided into lineages of greater or lesser depth, called *kacā* (or *kul* in Bhaktapur). In Lalitpur the Balimhā clan is divided into three lineages called Paṭuko (22 households), Gābahā (2 households), and Balimhā (narrowly defined) (8 households), names which also derive from residential localities. In Bhaktapur the Tsutsachē and Ipachē clans are divided into four and two lineages respectively, making a total of six for the whole town; they lack more precise local names. The members of kin groups of this sort call themselves *tāpā phuki*, that is 'distant kin', or *bā phuki*, 'split kin'. It is the impurity incurred at the moment of a death which best signifies the solidarity of the group: a death within the lineage pollutes all its members. However, this pollution lasts only a single day; it ends as soon as the corpse leaves the family's house or *cok* (interior courtyard, characteristic of the urban Newar dwelling). It is called *yana byā* in Newari, from *byāḥ*, which Thakur Lal Manandhar (1986: 183) translates as: 'Food given to a household in which a death has occurred, uncooked food with all that is necessary for preparing a meal including the firewood and spices.' In the six days which follow the cremation the women must come to offer their condolences to the family of the dead person and bring them uncooked rice, vegetables (*tarkāri*), flour, salt, and milk. This visit, called *byāḥ manegu*, indicates a closer kin relation to the dead person than the visit required of the women who are of the same clan, described above.

The division of the Bhaktapur Rājopādhyāyas into six lineages (*kul*) is reminiscent of the division in Lalitpur into six clans. It is very likely that the attraction of the number six, with its religious significance, has played a role here and that reality has had to be forced somewhat to fit this pre-established frame. Furthermore, in Lalitpur practitioners of Tantra make a connection between the six Rājopādhyāya clans and the six 'circles', *cakra*, which are found in the human body according to yogic thought. One should note that these six vital centres are situated in a vertical axis from the sacred plexus to the cranial aperture; the cosmic energy *kuṇḍalinī*, carried within each individual, ascends this axis. This concern for cosmic totalization goes even further since some informants make a correspondence between the six clans, the six *cakras*, and the urban space of Lalitpur.

Lineages are in their turn divided into still smaller groups: sub-lineages or groups of families. Such groups are known by the name of the area, *twāḥ*, or of the courtyard, *cok*, in which they are centred. Their members are considered to

be *phuki*, agnatic kin. If one of them dies, all the patrilineal kin of this sort are polluted for ten or eleven days. These sub-lineages play an important role in everyday life, especially at the level of mutual aid. The segmentation of the lineage into sub-lineages usually occurs in the seventh generation and seems to be accelerated by the occurrence of marriage relations on the mother's side between two members of the lineage (or clan, as the case may be). For example, a marriage may be arranged between a young man of the lineage and a girl who is the granddaughter (daughter's daughter) of another member of the lineage; this requires the lineage to split so that the two men are no longer members of the same lineage. It is from that moment that the members of the two groups cease to be *phuki*, near kin, and become *tāpā phuki*, distant kin.

The practice of adoption sometimes slightly modifies the membership of the patrilineal group. Adoption occurs most commonly when there is a lack of male offspring. The adopted child (Nw. *thyākā macā*; Np. *dharma putra*) always remains peripheral and is never wholly integrated within the lineage. He is polluted by the death of a member of his adopted kin but this impurity is less strong than that which affects the members of a lineage who are blood kin. Thus the *thyākā macā* can, if the occasion arises, take on priestly functions during the mourning period, whereas this is strictly forbidden for anyone else. Moreover he has the right to receive a 'sacrificial fee', *dakṣiṇā*, from the other members of his lineage or sub-lineage, whereas this is completely forbidden between ordinary agnatic kin. Adoptions from one city to another are commonplace. The adopted child has a slightly lesser status for the whole of his life.

The Rājopādhyāyas are in addition divided into *gotra*, an institution of direct Brahmanical inspiration. There are three *gotra* among them: Kausik, Gārgya, and Bhāradvaja. The Hwāgaḥcē of Kathmandu clan belongs to the first, most of the Rājopādhyāyas of Lalitpur belong to the second, and to the third belong

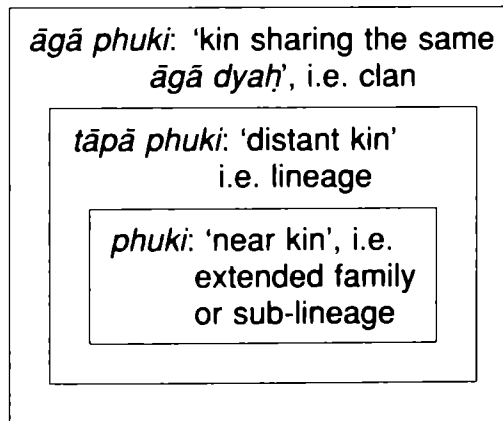


FIG. 6.1. The three categories of agnatic kin with the three corresponding levels of patrilineal affiliation among Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs

all the Rājopādhyāyas of Bhaktapur, a small group of those of Lalitpur, and the Makhāchē clan of Kathmandu. Originally, it is said, there was one *gotra* in each city: Kausik in Kathmandu, Gārgya in Lalitpur, and Bhāradvaja in Bhaktapur. These *gotra*, which are groups with very vague boundaries and little effective existence, are believed to have been founded by the ancient sages (*ṛṣi muni*) of Hindu mythology, who were sons of Brahmā. *Gotras* are large pan-Nepalese and pan-Indian entities which group together completely different castes. However, within any given caste, there is a certain relation between the *gotra* and kin groups. An exception to this rule is provided by the Balimhā clan of Rājopādhyāyas in Lalitpur: it consists, for reasons which remain obscure (possibly because of an adoption), of two lineages each belonging to a different *gotra*.

Even though connected to a prestigious Sanskritic tradition, the *gotra* only play a minor role in social organization. Contrary to what is normally the case among Brāhmaṇs, intra-*gotra* marriages are permitted here, particularly within the Gārgya and the Bhāradvaja. It is probable that this fact, abnormal from a strict orthodox point of view, is due to the difficulties in arranging marriages within a very small caste. According to some, intra-*gotra* unions are a recent development.

The existence of the *pravara*, an important institution for Brāhmaṇs, is also recognized. The word refers to that passage of the sacred texts which a given Vedic school uses to honour its ancestors. Thus the division into *pravara* refers to the 'branch' of the Veda (*vedko śākhā*) and to the *guru* of the Vedic school in question. The Rājopādhyāyas are divided into *tripravara* and *pañcapravara*. The former, who include the Bhāradvaja and one section of the Gārgya, tie the knot of their sacred thread three times. The latter, who include the Kausik and the rest of the Gārgya, tie the knot of the sacred thread five times. There is no hierarchy between the two groups. Contrary to what occurs among orthodox Brāhmaṇs, the Rājopādhyāyas may marry members of the same *pravara*. However, the union is forbidden if both the *gotra* and the *pravara* of the two families are identical.

## 5. Clan Divinities and the Locality

Each clan has its own Āgamic or Tantric deity, known as *āgā dyaḥ*. This category of deity is specific to the Newars, and in particular to the high Hindu and Buddhist castes.<sup>10</sup> This divinity is normally housed in a separate building, called *āgā chē* (literally 'the house of the *āgā dyaḥ*'), which is reserved for this purpose alone; usually it is situated in the part of the town from which the clan originates. The statue of the god is kept upstairs on the first floor. As we have seen, the *āgā dyaḥ* plays a central role in clan life and in the identity of the lineage. Marriage is forbidden between two families who share the same āgamic

deity. In Bhaktapur, for example, the two agnatic groups making up the Rājopādhyāya community of the city could not intermarry until recently, because their members worshipped the same *āgā dyaḥ*. It was only in 1974 that one of the two groups, the Ipachē, built a second separate temple, in Swāmalla, and installed their own deity there, leaving to the Tsutsachē Rājopādhyāyas the upkeep and the cult of the ancestral temple in Khaisimācok. Since this split, marriages between the two clans are permitted.

The *āgā dyaḥ* is the divinity of all the members of the kin group, but only those who have taken their Tantric initiation, *dikṣā*, can worship him. Only they are permitted to enter into the god's sanctuary and in principle they are forbidden to reveal the name of the *āgā dyaḥ* to the uninitiated. This division is the source of a hierarchy within the clan: in principle it reproduces the opposition between 'seniors' and 'juniors'. The head of the clan, the seniormost member (*thakālī*), is responsible for the cult of the *āgā dyaḥ*. All initiated members (*dekhā du pī*) of the kin group take it in turns to make the daily offerings (*nitya pūjā*), where this is done. The cult of the deity requires blood sacrifices at regular intervals, of goats of a single colour (*nikur* or *nikhāra*), as well as offerings of alcohol. Among the principal rituals, one should mention: *puchā pūjā*, literally 'offering the thread [*janai*] to the god', which takes place once a year; *dhamāchā pūjā*, offering the god *dhamā* flowers in springtime (Cait) or in the rainy season (Srāvan or Bhadau); *thā pūjā*, a rite which is related to the six *cakra* in the human body and which is performed on fixed dates different for each god or temple; *cahre pūjā*, rite of the fourteenth day of the month, in particular that of the dark fortnight, a very important date in the cult of āgamic deities. These rituals are secret and are not attended by large gatherings.

Every segmentation of the clan is accompanied by a corresponding division of the āgamic deity. However, quarrels within the kin group can also result in divisions of the *āgā dyaḥ* which are irregular from the point of view of the clan structure. Thus, three families of Hwāgaḥchē in Kathmandu no longer worship the āgamic deity of their group because of a conflict over precedence which has already been mentioned above; the cult itself has not yet been divided up, but all the signs are that it soon will be. In Lalitpur one lineage of the Balimhā clan (that of Paṭuko) decided several years ago to take the step of worshipping the common *āgā dyaḥ* separately from the other members of the clan. It should be noted that adopted children and their descendants lose all rights over their original āgamic deity and so, even if they return after two or three generations to their natal town, they can never be reintegrated into the clan of their ancestors.

What of the *digu dyaḥ* deities (Np. *kuldevatā*) who play such a crucial role in establishing the identity of lineages among all the Hindu people of Nepal? Here it is necessary to treat each city separately. In Kathmandu the two Rājopādhyāya clans each have their own *digu dyaḥ*: the members of the



Hwāgaḥchē clan worship Mahālakṣmī in Icangu, and those of Makhāchē worship Dhum Vārāhī in Bisālnagar. In Lalitpur and Bhaktapur there is only one *digu dyaḥ* for all the Rājopādhyāyas of the city. In Lalitpur it is Pūrṇacaṇḍī, a form of the goddess Siddhilakṣmī, whose temple is at Puñcalī, near Gābāhāḥ. Even though the temple is today within the boundaries of the city, it is considered to be a *pīṭha* (Nw. *pīgā*), a sanctuary which, as is well known, is usually found on the outskirts of the settlement.<sup>11</sup> In Bhaktapur the *digu dyaḥ* of the Rājopādhyāyas is a divinity with a secret name who used previously to be sited at the entrance to the city, near the Sala Garhi wood; today it is sited on the inside of the old royal palace, in the temple of Do Māju, that is to say, Taleju. Like all attempts to move a holy site, this transfer required a specific ritual called *dyaḥ saray yāyegu* (Nw.). During this ritual the priest uses a *mantra* to incorporate the god, while he is being moved, within his own body.<sup>12</sup>

The cult of these divinities (*deṃālī* or *degu pūjā*) is organized differently by different groups. In Lalitpur Pūrṇacaṇḍī is worshipped once a year, on the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Āśvin (September–October), by the heads of the Rājopādhyāya clans of the city. Each of them must bring a rice cake, called *bhujā* in Newari, and offer it to the goddess. In Kathmandu the members of the Hwāgaḥ clan hold a small joint celebration on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Cait (March–April) in Icangu, behind the temple of Nārāyaṇ. In Bhaktapur the Rājopādhyāyas of the Ipachē clan meet in spring at the time of the Bisket *jātrā* to have a meal together, after one of their number has worshipped the *digu dyaḥ*. In general, the cult of these deities is not, among the Rājopādhyāyas, the occasion for large numbers to come together and for the whole clan to feast together, as is the case with Newars when they worship their clan and lineage deities.<sup>13</sup> Most of the time Rājopādhyāya *digu dyaḥ* are only worshipped on the occasion of male initiation ceremonies (*vratabandha*) and weddings. Furthermore, their *digu dyaḥ* deities are represented with statues and have temples, whereas the *digu dyaḥ* deities of Newars are worshipped in the form of simple aniconic stones established in the open air outside the settlement.

The opposition between the Rājopādhyāyas' clan deities and those of the Newars can be pushed further still. Among high-caste Newars, the cult of the *āgā dyaḥ* and that of the *digu dyaḥ* are connected, often organically, because of their shared basis in patrilineal kinship and common ancestors. Among the Rājopādhyāyas there is a dissociation between the two: it is the *āgā dyaḥ* which is identified with the agnatic group and which in reality functions as the *kuldevatā*, clan or lineage deity; the *digu dyaḥ* defines the totality of the Rājopādhyāyas of a city and not a kin group (except in Kathmandu). The *digu dyaḥ* of the Rājopādhyāyas is more like a chosen deity, *iṣṭadevatā*, whom one chooses freely and under whose protection one places oneself. In general the Rājopādhyāya *digu dyaḥ* does not have an exclusive relation with a single kin

group, nor even with Brāhmaṇas: Pūrṇacaṇḍī and Dhum Vārāhī are worshipped by many other castes and social groups and not just by Rājopādhyāyas.

## 6. The Rules of Marriage and Kinship

Where marriage between related persons is concerned, the rule is as follows: it is proper to marry after the seventh generation in the paternal line and the fifth generation on the side of the mother. This rule, called that of the 'twelve' (the total of the number of prohibited generations on both sides) can be reduced to nine (five in the paternal line, four on the side of the mother) in case of need, when the availability of marriage partners proves to be too restricted. This second rule reduces considerably the number of forbidden marriages in the agnatic line and would often contradict the rule of clan exogamy; it is doubtful whether the rule of clan exogamy can ever be overruled in this way. As for alliances on the side of the mother, one should note that the minimum degree of relationship permitted between the families of bride and groom is no greater than among the majority of the Newar peasant caste (Toffin 1984: 110).

As with all Brāhmaṇ castes, widow remarriage is strictly forbidden. If it occurs, the couple are immediately excluded from the caste. The descendants of such unions are called Lākhe Barhmū. They can continue to carry on priestly functions for the Śreṣṭhas of the city, but only as a secondary priest (Atithi Barhmū),<sup>14</sup> never as the principal officiating priest. In other words it is forbidden for them to be a domestic priest (*purohit*). In Bhaktapur the two families of Lākhe Barhmū in the city continue to recite religious texts, *purān*, to the Newar population during the rainy season.

It is also forbidden for divorced people, whether male or female, to remarry. In strict Hindu orthodoxy the matrimonial union is sacred and therefore indissoluble. A divorced woman, like a widow, is considered an impure being, inauspicious and low in status. If she marries again she will be excommunicated by her caste. I heard of only a single case of this kind.

Rājopādhyāyas used to marry pre-pubertal girls, in the manner of Indian Brāhmaṇas. In this way the marriage took place between two pure beings and the dangerous period during which the young post-pubertal girl was not yet married was avoided. Consequently Rājopādhyāyas did not observe the specifically Newar rite of *ihī* during which the pre-pubertal girl is married symbolically to the *bel* fruit, a symbol of Nārāyaṇa (or of Śiva according to some). Today things have changed. Since 1951 child marriage has been forbidden in Nepal. Rājopādhyāya males today marry post-pubertal girls. Some of them now celebrate *ihī* for their young girls, so that, they say, the girl is already married, albeit only symbolically, before the arrival of her first menstruation (Nw. and Np. *rāja*). But this rite, where it is done, is carried out in a simplified manner in a few hours, and on an individual basis; it is never performed collectively as

with the Newars. Furthermore, Rājopādhyāyas do not perform the *kanyādān*, the 'gift of a virgin', as part of this ceremony as Newars do. The *kanyādān* is the central part of marriage for the Rājopādhyāyas, and it is performed during the real marriage, in the house of the bride.

Thus kinship and caste determine the choice of a marriage partner. However, economic factors also play a role, since a marriage tie requires a considerable volume of prestations, nearly all made by the family of the bride to the family of the groom. Marriage is in effect considered to be a gift, *dān*, the gift which a man makes of his daughter to his son-in-law; hence the crucial role of *kanyādān*, which is not found among Newar castes. This is the reason why the Rājopādhyāyas of Bhaktapur, whose standard of living is relatively low, rarely marry with those of Kathmandu, who have gained considerably from the development which the capital has experienced in recent years. For their part, the young women of Kathmandu show little enthusiasm to be married in Bhaktapur, which, although it is certainly an orthodox city, has not much benefited from the modernization effort of the country and appears fossilized in its past.

In contrast to what happens among the Newar peasant caste, among the Rājopādhyāyas wife-takers occupy a position of clear superiority in relation to wife-givers. The son-in-law (Nw. *jilājā*), occupies a central and prestigious place in socio-religious life. He is considered to be an incarnation of the god Viṣṇu. At a meal he is served first and he receives by right the best food in abundant quantity. The *lākhā* cake which he is offered during the wedding ceremony is considered to represent the discus (*cakra*) of Viṣṇu. The son-in-law is pampered and honoured on all major ritual occasions; his in-laws bow down to him and wash his feet during the marriage ceremony. This hierarchical model is found also in the following generation in the relationship between the mother's brother and his sister's son. The latter is always treated like a king in the house of his maternal uncle; he can do whatever he pleases there. The presents which his uncle has to make to him during the different life-cycle rituals through which he passes express and reinforce still further this hierarchical relation between givers and takers of women.

There is a homology between this asymmetry and the function of priesthood. If one's *purohit* is sick or is unavailable for some reason, the sacrificer (the patron of a ritual or sacrifice) chooses either his son-in-law or his sister's son (*bhinā macā*) to carry out life-cycle rituals in his house. As a general rule, the sacrificer is to the priest what the father-in-law is to his son-in-law and what (in part) the mother's brother is to his sister's son. The *purohit* (who is never chosen from among patrilineal kin) can never be chosen from the family of the maternal uncle, who are considered as lower in status. It is a corollary of this that the maternal uncle may never accept a sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*) from his uterine nephew. As elsewhere in India, the function of priesthood is here doubly determined, both by relations of caste and by those of kinship.

## 7. Funeral Associations and Social Control

The Rājopādhyāyas call their funeral association *sanāḥ guthi* in Newari and *āpat uddhār goṣṭhi* in Sanskrit. These associations, which are unique to Newar civilization, are charged with carrying out the cremations of their members and helping the family of the dead person to pass through this difficult period. The members (*guthiyār*) of the association are obliged to take part in the funeral procession of a dead member; they must come wearing a *dhoti*, in bare feet, with their upper body covered only with a thin woollen wrap, and with their sacred thread placed on their left shoulder.<sup>15</sup> They carry the dead person to the pyre and take care that the body is reduced entirely to ashes. Only Rājopādhyāyas may touch the corpse. Members of service castes are invited only to build the pyre, play music, and shave the relatives of the dead person.

These associations are organized on the basis of each city of the Valley: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur. In Kathmandu there are two, in Bhaktapur there is one, and in Lalitpur, as will be explained below, there are none. The associations contain only Brāhmaṇs; males only, since women are excluded from them. Membership is optional and totally independent of kin links: one may join the association of one's choice, without worrying about one's clan allegiance. It is sufficient to live in the relevant settlement. It is therefore quite natural for a family which comes from Lalitpur but has migrated to Kathmandu to change its *sanāḥ guthi*. This is done by paying an entrance fee or taking on certain obligations in the coming year.

The *guthiyārs* are supposed to come together and hold a feast once a year. In Kathmandu one of the two associations of the city holds its feast on the third day of the dark fortnight of Pus (December–January), and the other on the eighth day of the same half of the same month. The members go first to worship the goddess Indrāyaṇī (= Lhuti Ajimā) to the north of the capital by the bank of the Viṣṇumatī and offer her a goat. Then they hold the feast in the house of one of the members. All members of the association must take part in these offerings and reunions. Anyone who is absent must pay a fine (Nw. *bā tayegu*) of 20 to 25 rupees. During the meeting the division of tasks for the following year is decided. Everything is recorded in a register.

The association runs according to a very precise system of rotation. The *guthiyārs* must take it in turns to carry the corpse of the dead person and to organize the annual feast. For example, in Bhaktapur, where it is the custom for the corpse to be carried to the pyre by six men, turns change at each death. The system is less rigid than it may appear: it is possible to swap one's place with someone else if prevented from participating by some reason or other. The cost of holding the feast is borne by the organizer. In some cases the association has assets. Donations are deposited in a bank and a treasurer makes sure that the capital bears interest.

Funeral associations frequently split up because of internal quarrels. Until 1910 there had been only one *sanāḥ guthi* in Kathmandu; in that year it split into two. Today the Rājopādhyāyas of the city are still divided between these two associations, the one with twenty members, the other with nine. In Lalitpur quarrels have been so violent that funeral associations have broken down entirely. In spite of all efforts to revive them, cremation is carried out at present only by the close relatives of the dead person. In Bhaktapur, on the other hand, the Rājopādhyāyas have been able to resist such centrifugal pressures. The only *sanāḥ guthi* of the city depends upon another very important social institution of the Rājopādhyāya caste: the *upākarma guthi*. In practice the *upākarma guthi* carries out the functions of the *sanāḥ guthi*.

This second type of association belongs to the category of Newar *deś guthi*, local *guthis* whose purpose is to oversee social control and which fulfil the role of caste council at the local level. There are three Rājopādhyāya associations of this sort in the Valley, one for each of the three old royal cities. Only the Rājopādhyāyas are members. In contrast to the funeral associations, it is obligatory to belong to the *upākarma guthi*: all adult males of the local segment of the caste must belong to it and take part in its activities.

The members of the *upākarma guthi* meet once a year on Janai Pūrṇimā (Nw. Guni Punhi), full moon of the month of Sāun (July–August). As is well known, it is on that day, the most holy day of all, that high castes change their sacred thread (*janai*). Even though this festival is celebrated by all the twice-born (*dvija*) who wear the sacred thread, and thus by different castes, it is considered in Hindu tradition to be particularly the festival of Brāhmaṇs (Gonda 1965: 326–7). In each of the three cities of the Valley the Rājopādhyāyas meet on this date at a specific site on the banks of a nearby river. The Rājopādhyāyas of Lalitpur meet at Śaṅkhamūl, the holy site to the north of the city where the Bāgmatī and Manoharā rivers meet; those of Kathmandu meet at Swabhā Bhagavatī, a local temple to the north-west of the city on the right bank of the Viṣṇumatī; those of Bhaktapur meet at the Khware (or Khwāre), a sacred complex along the banks of the Hanumante, on the south side of the city.

The Rājopādhyāya men begin by bathing (*snāna*) in the river, wearing only a white *dhoti*, in order to rid themselves of all the sins which they may have committed over the course of the past year. Then the heads of the clan (*thakāli*) carry out various rituals including: a *rudri* (hymn to Śiva), an offering to the seven sages (*ṛṣi tarpaṇa*), an offering of balls of fruit (*phal piṇḍa*) to the ancestors, to the sages, and to the king. During the course of these complex rites the sacred thread is changed. The seniors of the clan take care to recite sacred formulae over the sacred thread which is to be put on. All these ceremonies take place by the banks of a river, where there is running water. However, if someone is too ill to move, he may change his thread at home.

Several meetings and feasts take place during and after Janai Pūrṇimā. Some of them are only for the leaders and dignitaries of the caste, others are for all

members of the *guthi*. Until very recently the expenses were covered by the revenue from land owned by the *guthis*. This land has today been registered by the tenants in their own names; it no longer provides any revenue to the associations. The *upākarma guthis* have to be financed by a system of subscriptions and a wide appeal for financial contributions. Responsibility for the functioning of the *guthi* comes each year to a different person (Nw. *pāhlā*). All male Brāhmaṇs, who have been initiated and wear the sacred thread, must take their turn, beginning from the oldest and proceeding to the youngest. Since, however, the number of Rājopādhyāyas in the same town is sometimes larger than 200, it can happen that one passes one's whole life without the turn arriving. In Bhaktapur the system of rotation is organized in such a way that one's turn as *pāhlā* can only come between the ages of 38 and 42, a time of life when a man is considered to be in good physical health but at the same time to have sufficient resources for the task.

The responsibilities of the *pāhlā* are numerous and are resented as an extremely heavy burden, since it is expected that he should finance the deficit, which always exists, from his own personal income. In Lalitpur, for example, three days before the full moon of Sāun the turn-holder has to invite all the young Rājopādhyāyas who have gone through their *vratabandha* initiation that year, as well as all the influential members of the caste (in particular the heads of the six clans), and the priests of the Taleju and Agni temples. To each of them he offers a lemon and four baskets of flowers, a custom known as *swāta wanegu* in Newari. Several days after the full moon of Sāun, the turn-holder of the Lalitpur *upākarma guthi* has to organize a procession called the Narasiṃha Yātrā. He himself has to take the role of the god Narasiṃha, a mask of the deity on his face and a crown (*mukuṭa*) on his head. Once the procession is at an end, he has to invite all the Rājopādhyāyas of the city to eat in his house. In Kathmandu, this meal, called *lisā bhway*, takes place four days after the full moon.<sup>16</sup>

For the young initiates the festival of Janai Pūrṇimā marks an essential step in the process of socialization. During the *vratabandha* initiation (Nw. *burhā tayegu*), the young man receives his sacred thread and his *guru* whispers in his ear the *gāyatrī*, a Vedic formula taken from the Rig Veda. Thus he passes from the state of a *śūdra*, which he was in from his birth, to that of the twice-born, *dvija*. However, it is only several months later, on the day of Janai Pūrṇimā, that the young man is definitively integrated into his caste. On this date, in effect, the initiate is admitted to the *upākarma guthi*: his name is registered as a member (Nw. *nā chwayegu* or *darta yāyegu*). If he contracts a forbidden marriage, or one which his relatives consider to be so, the young man will find himself barred from the association. Henceforth he will never again be considered wholly a Brāhmaṇ and he will not be able to take part in the religious activities of his caste. In short, the *upākarma guthi* functions as a caste council and plays a determining role in social control. The clan leaders,

who are at the head of the organization in each city, are the guarantors of the traditional order.

The name of this association, *upākarma*, derives from the Sanskrit name of the ceremony which took place at the beginning of Vedic study in ancient India. Certain texts stipulate that this rite, also called *upākaraṇa* or *vedārambha*, should be carried out on the full moon of Sāun (Kane 1941: ii (2). 808), the very day of the festival of Brāhmaṇs. One is supposed to celebrate it just after the *upanayana*. The young boy used then to leave his family and go to live with his spiritual preceptor or *guru*. The period of religious instruction lasted twelve years, during which the young student (*brahmacārin*) devoted himself to studying the Veda and to carrying out certain ascetic practices, the most important being total chastity. Today, religious instruction among the Rājopādhyāyas of Nepal begins with the *vratabandha* and usually lasts only for several months, at most several years. The student does not live with his *guru* during this period. He learns the Veda, in the morning before going to school or in the evening, from his father or his paternal uncle; he lives at home while doing so. It all seems as if the strictly religious and educational aspects have disappeared and left in their place a ritual of caste incorporation, celebrated with great emphasis. The old Sanskrit vocabulary persists—*brahmacārin*, *upākarma*—but it is the question of caste status which is important today.

It used to be the custom for all the heads of the Rājopādhyāya clans of the Valley to meet together from time to time. This assembly, presided over by the oldest member of the caste, is called the *tine sāhāra sabhā* (assembly of the three cities). It deliberates on questions of status and attempts to arbitrate in disputes within *guthis*. It seems that it has not come together for more than thirty years.

## 8. Recent Changes

Like all the other inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley the Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs have experienced unprecedented changes since 1951. The opening of the country to the outside which followed from the fall of the Ranas, the development of service industries and of tourism, the modernization of the whole framework of life—all these have transformed the traditional economic and cultural landscape. The rise of Kathmandu, which is more and more taking on the allure of a modern city, has already led many Rājopādhyāyas to leave Lalitpur and Bhaktapur and settle in the capital. Considerable divergences have appeared. Nowadays the Rājopādhyāyas of Kathmandu are open to foreign influences and to modernity; they take much greater advantage from the changes in the economy than the Brāhmaṇs of the other two cities. Some of them even work in the tourist trade. These disparities may undermine the spirit of caste solidarity, just as movements of population are weakening the traditional clan structures which used to be based entirely on the locality. As

elsewhere, the power of the seniors (*thakāli*) is being contested by their juniors: they find it hard to accept the guidance of old men whom they regard as old-fashioned.

The Brahmanic rules of life appear more and more incompatible with the new rhythm and constraints of life in a modern city. Traditionally most Rājopādhyāyas had a stable in the ground floor of their house where they kept a cow, since its products are indispensable for the performance of the daily sacrifices. Today this custom has almost wholly disappeared because of the absence of pasture and because the general conditions of urban life no longer permit it. In general, rituals tend today to be considerably shortened for reasons of material convenience: there is simply no longer time for long-drawn-out rites! The *upanayana* initiation, the key moment in the life of the young Brāhmaṇ, still used to last three months at the beginning of this century. Today it is completed in a single day. Finally, the number of those taking Tantric initiation is growing smaller, since young people hesitate to embark on a religious path requiring them to fulfil innumerable rules which often appear outmoded in the context of modern life. This reluctance threatens the very identity of the caste, which has always been closely connected with Tantrism.

None the less, for the moment the Rājopādhyāyas maintain their religious identity intact. They are still renowned throughout Nepal for their strict orthodoxy and their great learning in certain areas. Completely absent from the agricultural field, barely engaged in commerce, they still embody the highest spiritual values. In spite of their inclination towards autonomy, which derives from an ancient Brahmanic tradition and which prevents them from limiting themselves within a strictly ethnic framework, other Nepalese still identify them with the Newars. The Newars themselves also regard the Rājopādhyāyas as *their* Brāhmaṇs.

### Notes

1. Fieldwork was carried out in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur in April and May 1978, then in 1986 and 1988. I would like to thank Saphalya Amatya, Bimala Karamjit, Krishna Prasad Rimal, and Nutandhar Sharma for their help.
2. The exceptions to this rule (Toffin 1984: 289) are evidence of the erosion of traditional caste ties. I have come across no examples of Rājopādhyāyas acting as domestic priests for Parbatiyās, but, where there is a mixed marriage, the two *purohīts*, Rājopādhyāya and Parbatiyā, can celebrate some of the marriage rituals together.
3. On the history of the Rājopādhyāyas see D. R. Regmi (1965: i. 679; ii. 438–41, 756), and Witzel (1976).
4. See also Rimal (1983: 10–11).
5. See in particular Padmagiri's chronicle published by Hasrat (1970: 38). It is interesting to note that Lalitpur Buddhists have exactly the reverse picture of these events. Their myths refer to the forced conversion and/or slaughter of Newar



Buddhists when Śaṅkara Ācārya came to Nepal (cf. Hasrat 1970: 38–9, and the chronicle translated by Wright 1972: 118–20). Buddhists link Maṇicur with these persecutions just as Brāhmaṇs associate the same place with their own ‘defeat’ placed a few years earlier.

6. On the Tantric tradition of the Rājopādhyāya, cf. Toffin (1989; forthcoming).
7. These fields were probably *birta* or *guthi* land. On the extension of state control over land in the Kathmandu Valley after Prithvi Narayan’s conquest, see M. C. Regmi (1978b: 696–7; 1971: 46–9).
8. In the Code of 1854 the Jhā and the Bhaṭṭa were classed among ‘Indian Brahmins’, just below the Devbhāju; cf. Höfer (1979: 151–2). Contrary to what Rosser affirms (1966: 85), these two Brahman castes do not belong in the Newar system.
9. On Tantric initiation (*dikṣā*) among the Newars, cf. Toffin (1984: 556–8) and Gellner (1992: 266–81).
10. On these *āgā dyaḥ* divinities, see Toffin (1984: 558–61) for Hindu castes, T. T. Lewis (1984: 123 ff.) and Gellner (1992: 282–92) for Buddhist castes.
11. Toffin (1984: 464). Some informants also list Pūrṇacaṇḍī among the ten Daśamahāvidyā sanctuaries of the city. Pūrṇacaṇḍī has a Rājopādhyāya temple priest performing regular rituals throughout the year. This is extremely puzzling since in theory Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs are considered to be too high in status to serve as *pūjārī* in a *pīṭha* type of temple.
12. More strictly, the Newari for this ritual is *dyaḥ sālāḥ tayegu*. Here the expression used by the Rājopādhyāyas derives from the Nepali *sarnu*, ‘to shift’.
13. For a description of the cult of the *digu dyaḥ*, cf. Vergati (1979) and Toffin (1984: 488–95).
14. On this category of priests, cf. Toffin (1979b: 251). Barhmū (or Brahmū, Barahmū) is the Newari name for Brāhmaṇ (Np. Bāhun).
15. It is doubtful whether *guthi*-members who are not relatives of the dead person comply with this rule of dress.
16. For a more detailed description of the rituals of the *upākarma guthi* in Lalitpur, see Toffin (1989; forthcoming).

# Śākyas and Vajrācāryas: From Holy Order to Quasi-Ethnic Group

*David N. Gellner*

## *1. Introduction*

Who are the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas? From B. H. Hodgson and Sylvain Lévi to John Locke and Siegfried Lienhard, scholars have sought to understand them as the Nepalese inheritors of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, which died out, largely because of Muslim depredations, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The chronological focus of the present essay is less ambitious: I shall restrict myself to a time-scale roughly within this century.

It is impossible to confine oneself purely to the present because any attempt to describe the social organization of a Newar caste, and perhaps especially the Śākya and Vajrācārya caste, has to come to grips with the fact that it is changing. Such change is difficult to quantify but the pace of change is certainly faster now than, say, a century ago. Needless to say, the Newars themselves are aware that their traditions are changing. To put the point in the more appropriate active mood, they know that they are modifying their customs and social relations in response to changing circumstances. They frequently discuss the matter and even, though rarely successfully, try to control and direct the change through collective action. I shall try to show how their self-identity is metamorphosing from that of a caste of monks and priests standing apart from the social order to that of an ethnic minority within a plural, but mostly Hindu nation-state.

I use the term 'tradition' advisedly. To explain some aspects of the present one must refer back to a remembered and reconstructed past 'traditional' situation. But this does not mean that the 'traditional' situation was stable and timeless, or that different paths of development might not have been followed under different conditions. It means rather that out of the flux of history several reference points have been chosen—not arbitrarily, but because they help to explain the present-day practices and structures which are the focus of this essay. To answer other questions, other choices could be made. For example, a

historian interested in the question of how the Rana regime's new methods of governing affected civil society might want to distinguish the observance of 'traditional' customs under that regime, an observance backed by the force of a new type of law, from the observance of the same customs under the Malla kings, when the political context was quite different. For present purposes, however, that particular distinction is relatively unimportant.

With these cautionary remarks in mind, we can say that traditionally the Śākya and Vajrācāryas form a composite Buddhist sacerdotal caste. Śākya and Vajrācāryas deny the religious supremacy both of Brāhmaṇs and of Hindu scriptures: they derive their legitimacy from Mahāyāna Buddhism. As a caste providing priests for Newar Buddhists they have themselves been called, with some justice, 'Buddhist Brāhmaṇs'.<sup>2</sup> As such they can be compared with other non-Brāhmaṇ and anti-Hindu priestly castes existing within a Hindu environment, such as the *ācāryas* of the Lingayats or the *bhaṭṭārakas* of the Jains of Maharashtra. Unlike these latter cases, however, the Śākya and Vajrācāryas did not traditionally have to exist in competition with, and generally subordinate to, celibate renouncers.<sup>3</sup> Like both Lingayats and Jains, Śākya and Vajrācāryas are often regarded by Hindus, and on occasion choose to regard themselves, as followers of a sect within Hinduism. But their rejection of Brahmanism ensures them a lower position in the Hindu hierarchy than they are prepared to accept. Thus, although Śākya and Vajrācāryas may occasionally speak the language of Hindu-Buddhist ecumenism, their traditions and practices keep them apart from Hinduism and constitute a challenge to it.

The specific nature of Śākya and Vajrācārya identity can be highlighted if we ask to what extent they themselves accept the scholars' view of them as 'Buddhist Brāhmaṇs'. The answer is not simple. If we take the *varṇa* framework of *brāhmaṇ*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*, the basic Newar Buddhist view—expressed in both written and oral accounts—is that Śākya and Vajrācāryas have their origin in all four *varṇas*. Śākya and Vajrācāryas are together monks and as such shave their head entirely, leaving no top-knot, for important rituals, unlike householders of the four *varṇas*. This fact is well known to other Newars and marks the Śākya and Vajrācāryas as different from them. In an important sense, then, Śākya and Vajrācāryas stand outside the social order of the four *varṇas*. They would say that they stand outside and above it.

However, from the strict Hindu point of view, which does not accept their religious claims, Śākya and Vajrācāryas are regarded as neither *brāhmaṇ* nor *kṣatriya*, but as *vaiśyas* and/or *śūdras*. The Rana legal system classified them in effect as *śūdras*, along with most other Newars (Höfer 1979: 45, 137). In Bhaktapur, Brāhmaṇs, but not other Hindu castes, even treat them as unclean, and cite this fact in explaining why the royal Kumārī goddess must be incarnated in a Śākya or Vajrācārya girl (the goddess herself specified a Dyaḥlā girl) (Levy 1990: 106, 544). One of the Śākya's and Vajrācāryas' own traditions

claims that at an earlier epoch the Brāhmaṇ advisers of the Hindu king Sthiti Malla (reigned 1382–95) accepted them as internally homogeneous and standing outside the *varṇa* hierarchy, not needing to be placed, like everyone else, within it; thus they were said to be like Hindu renunciators (*saṃnyāsī*). Presumably the nineteenth-century chronicle which relates this is referring to the married Hindu renunciators found in Nepal and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The historical claims of the chronicle need to be treated with caution, even though it names each of Sthiti Malla's advisers: as Lévi pointed out long ago (1905: i. 196), the nineteenth-century chronicles aimed to legitimate the present Newar order in the eyes of the new Gorkhali rulers and are therefore far from impartial records. None the less, it is certainly true, as claimed by the chronicle, that Śākyas and Vajrācāryas can be regarded as Buddhist married renunciators as well as Buddhist Brāhmaṇs.

There has been considerable scholarly debate in recent years over the nature of Brāhmaṇhood.<sup>5</sup> It has tended to focus on the paradox that, although the function of Brāhmaṇs is to be priests, that function is demeaning and the ideal Brāhmaṇ is not a priest but embodies the values of a socially uninvolved ascetic renouncer. It would not be quite accurate to say the same thing of the ideal Vajrācārya. Although Vajrācāryas and Śākyas are, at one level of identity, married monks, the Vajrācāryas add a further level on top of this: they are in addition Tantric adepts practising on behalf of others; for this they need to be married. The ideal Vajrācārya is not a renouncer or an ascetic, but a sexually active Tantric saint (*mahāsiddha*) who practises ritual for others while maintaining awareness of the emptiness of all phenomena. How this works in terms of ritual and ideological legitimization is discussed briefly below (Section 3).

Certainly the Vajrācāryas seem to combine various different aspects of priesthood that Hinduism aspires to keep separate. By contrast Hinduism, in line with its hierarchical logic, both separates and ranks different types of priest (although the ranking is disputed in some cases): renouncer (*saṃnyāsī*), scholar (*paṇḍit*), teacher (*guru* or *ācārya*), domestic priest (*purohit*), temple priest (*pūjārī*), pilgrimage priest (*paṇḍā*), and death priest (*mahābrāhmaṇa*). There are no doubt others less widely distributed. Newar Hinduism adds high-ranking Karmācāryas, Śaivite Tantric priests who either carry out esoteric Hindu rituals by themselves or assist Brāhmaṇs in so doing; the *ghaṭṣū ācā*, a lower ranking (*pāñcthariya*) Karmācārya responsible for the purificatory fire sacrifice after a death; and also a class of peasant Śaivite Tantric priests who perform life-cycle rites for certain groups of Maharjans.<sup>6</sup> Except for the death priest, a function fulfilled by another caste (see Section 4), Vajrācāryas fill simultaneously *all* the different priestly roles which within Hinduism are performed by separate and ranked sub-castes.

Within the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, only Vajrācāryas may be domestic priests. Thus, Riley-Smith (1982: 86) objected to the epithet 'Buddhist

Brāhmaṇs' being applied also to Śākyas, since they may not be priests for others. He is certainly right that Śākyas do have an identity different from Vajrācāryas, as we shall see. It is also true that, at least in their myths, Vajrācāryas themselves see a connection with Brāhmaṇs that Śākyas do not. Several origin stories of Vajrācārya lineages derive them from Brāhmaṇ ones (Locke 1985: 84, 156–7, 317, 323). Still, the parallel with Brāhmaṇs for both Śākyas and Vajrācāryas can be upheld none the less, on the grounds that there are also lower-ranking Brāhmaṇs (in particular temple priests) who do not have the right to be domestic priests. There is in fact no distinction made between Vajrācāryas and Śākyas in their role as god-guardians (*dyahpāhlā*) of monasteries. That is, to use the Hindu categories, Śākyas and Vajrācāryas have an equal entitlement to be temple priests, but only Vajrācāryas may also be domestic priests.

Within Newar society as a whole, the status of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas depended ultimately, and still depends to some degree, on maintaining a pious and religious life-style. As a sacerdotal caste they had no right to push themselves forward as political leaders, although they could and did practise commerce. Only the respect of others for their religious vocation, and others' fear of their magico-religious power, gave them protection in a predominantly Hindu environment. These pressures have meant that Śākyas and Vajrācāryas show a relatively higher level of personal piety than members of other castes (even in a time of overall decline in religious observance) and that collectively they display a higher degree of cohesiveness where religious events are concerned (although none in economic matters). A Śreṣṭha man once remarked admiringly to me how very much 'unity' Śākyas and Vajrācāryas have. For a caste of their size, they do indeed seem capable of high levels of co-operation: more so than the Śreṣṭhas, who are endlessly subdivided by status, or the Maharjans, who are divided by both status and locality.

## 2. Size, Location, and Occupation

We have more accurate figures for the size of the Śākya and Vajrācārya caste than for any caste of a similar size, thanks to John Locke's exhaustive survey (1985) of all the Newar Buddhist monasteries of the Valley. It is possible to conduct such a survey because every adult male Śākya and Vajrācārya must be a member of a recognized monastery. Just how this monastery functions as a temple complex and guarantor of status will be considered further below. For present purposes we should note that the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are all married householders and that what I have called a monastery is indeed defined as such (a *vihāra*) in the culture.

Locke's survey revealed a total of 15,027 initiated Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in the Valley.<sup>7</sup> He reckons that one should multiply his total by three to allow for

females and uninitiated boys. This may be slightly on the high side. In any case, one can say with some confidence that the entire caste numbers between 35,000 and 45,000 people. In addition there are Śākyas and Vajrācāryas not included in this total who live in places such as Tansen and Chainpur in the Nepalese hills and have lost contact with their monastery of origin. Contrast this with a total for the entire Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇ community of approximately 1,500 people (see p. 186).

Locke's survey also reveals one of the reasons why Lalitpur has a reputation for being more Buddhist than Kathmandu or Bhaktapur. Almost half (44.9%) of the total of all Śākyas and Vajrācāryas belong to Lalitpur monasteries. Nearly a third (32.3%) are members of monasteries in Kathmandu, 11.7 per cent of monasteries in Bhaktapur, and the remaining 11.1 per cent of monasteries in villages outside Lalitpur or Bhaktapur.<sup>8</sup> Not only are Śākyas and Vajrācāryas concentrated in Lalitpur, they have a much higher profile there than elsewhere. In the old city of Lalitpur they may constitute as much as a fifth of the total population, whereas in Kathmandu, with its much larger population, the proportion of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas must be much smaller.<sup>9</sup> Among Vajrācāryas and Śākyas as a whole Vajrācāryas represent 37.9 per cent of the total. This proportion varies, however, from less than a third (31.3%) in Lalitpur and surrounding villages to approaching half in Kathmandu (43.4%) and Bhaktapur (45.8%).

Ownership of land, both by individual families and collectively through monasteries, was crucial for the maintenance of the Śākyas' and Vajrācāryas' élite status. Their legitimacy as landowners depended, in turn, on their maintaining their sacerdotal vocation. As a high, urban caste most Vajrācāryas and Śākyas still consider it inappropriate to do agricultural or unskilled physical work, although some who live in outlying villages are said to do so. Most own at least some land and have it worked by tenant farmers, usually Maharjans. Some Vajrācāryas—a small minority—still live from the priesthood alone. Most Śākyas are artisans and in Lalitpur, but not Kathmandu, most Vajrācāryas are too. Traditionally, the single most important artisan profession was that of goldsmith. Śākya and Vajrācārya goldsmiths have spread throughout the hills of Nepal and beyond. The demand for goldsmiths has evidently fallen, however, since many in the Valley who used to earn their living thus are now god-makers or 'curio'-makers producing for the tourist trade.<sup>10</sup>

Two writers on the Newars have stated that the hierarchy of artisans reflects the metals they work in (Shepard 1985: 59; Lienhard 1989: 594), an idea also found in India (Ketkar 1909: 20; Pocock 1962: 85), where artisans, including goldsmiths, tend to rank very low, as they do among the Parbatiyās. Such a homology gives the following, certainly very striking, correspondences: Vajrācārya/gold, Śākya/silver, Tāmra-kār/copper and Kaṃsakār/bronze, Śīlpakār/wood, Lohākār/iron. However, three important points need to be made. (1) The correspondences are only very approximate (Śākyas in fact work

gold, silver, wood, bronze, and copper; in Lalitpur Tāmrakārs and Śilpakārs intermarry). (2) The idea that there is such a correspondence is never proposed by Śākyas and Vajrācāryas themselves and is no part of their own identity, which is entirely focused on Buddhism. (3) Pocock suggests that the internal hierarchy of artisans may in fact reflect the degree to which they are embedded in local, traditional, *jajmānī* relations, with the goldsmith, the most market-orientated artisan, highest. He also points out that artisans, like merchants, have a tendency to be 'separatist' and 'heretical' because of this market orientation (1962: 86–7).

A considerable minority of both Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are engaged in shopkeeping and commerce, and a few are rich men, having inherited fortunes made trading in Tibet before 1959. The practice of commerce may well be very old, since the documents collected by Kölver and Śākya (1985) reveal Śākyas and Vajrācāryas actively buying, selling, and mortgaging land as far back as the thirteenth century. They also show that monasteries as corporate institutions did the same. The main beneficiaries of land donated to, and owned by, monasteries were the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas who belonged to the monastery in question. This land, somewhat like the land held by Oxbridge colleges, funded the specialists, the rituals, and the feasts which maintained the monastery as a sacred centre. The loss of land, and consequent decline of many monasteries, is discussed below.

Although collectively they comprise an élite, it would be wrong to imagine that all Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are rich and influential. Far from it. Just as there are many poor Brāhmaṇs, so there are many relatively poor, landless Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, who live hand-to-mouth as artisans. Their caste status was itself a resource, however. In the past rich and powerful Śākya men made sure that no caste-fellow in the locality went hungry; in return the poor showed them much greater deference than they do today.

### 3. *Caste: Śākyas and Vajrācāryas as Monks and Priests*

Many observers of Newar Buddhism have had problems understanding it. How can the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas be monks when they are married? What form of Buddhism is it that emphasizes ritual and devotion to a vast pantheon of saviour figures? How is it that Newar Buddhism lays stress on the secret transmission of its highest teachings, reserving Tantric Initiation for certain high castes and the priestly vocation for Vajrācāryas alone? How indeed has it come to accept caste, not only in social matters, but as the defining criterion of its religious order? Some of these questions may be prompted by ethnocentric Western assumptions about Buddhism (e.g. that it is a rational, atheistic, and ethical philosophy, not a religion). Some of the questions listed make presuppositions which are appropriate to the Theravāda Buddhism of Sri Lanka and

South-East Asia but not to Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna Buddhism. To disentangle all these preconceptions would take us far away from our task of analysing the social organization of the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas.

Without attempting to answer all these questions, it is at least necessary to explain how Newar Buddhism legitimates its priesthood in its own (not Hinduism's) terms and how it is that Newar Buddhism may be referred to either as Mahāyāna Buddhism or as Vajrayāna Buddhism. Newar Buddhists see their tradition as structured by a hierarchy of three 'Ways' (*yāna*). The Disciples' Way (*śrāvakayāna*), which is associated with the values of restraint and monasticism, is an essential part of their religion and crucial for the legitimation of their control of monasteries and monastic deities, but it is only the first rung of the Buddhist ladder. The Great Way (*mahāyāna*), the next level up, is associated with householder status, in which one worships all the gods and fulfils one's inherited religious duties, as well as with the propagation of the Buddhist message of salvation for all. The Diamond Way (*vajrayāna*) is associated with the cult of secret Tantric deities, present in each monastery and most high-caste homes. This forms a privileged and restricted path within the Great Way or Mahāyāna.

The monastery to which every Śākya and Vajrācārya male must belong encapsulates all three Ways: its main shrine to Śākyamuni Buddha and its very existence as a monastery proclaim the Disciples' Way; its shrines to *bodhisattvas* such as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī belong to the Great Way; and the secret Tantric shrine belongs to the Diamond Way. The hierarchy of Three Ways is both expressed and experienced in the architecture of Newar Buddhism's most holy sites, and in the rituals appropriate to each part of them.

The esoteric path of the Diamond Way is available, through Tantric Initiation, only to high castes. This restriction is justified on the grounds that only they have the leisure to practise it fully and not neglect its duties.<sup>11</sup> In carrying out the daily ritual they follow the Tantric path *for themselves*. Only Vajrācāryas may act as (family) priests, that is, make use of the Tantric path *for others*. One consequence of this is that Vajrācāryas see themselves, and are seen by others, to be the guardians of Newar Buddhism to a much greater extent than Śākyas. Concomitantly, Śākyas have a greater tendency than Vajrācāryas, especially practising Vajrācārya priests, to be open to other forms of Buddhism.

When Newar Buddhists refer to their religion they call it *buddha dharma* ('the *dharma* of the Buddha') or *buddha mata* ('the creed of the Buddha'), and they call themselves *buddhamārgī* ('followers of the path of the Buddha') as opposed to *śivamārgī* ('followers of the path of Śiva'). When they want to distinguish it from other forms of Buddhism they call it Mahāyāna Buddhism. In other words, they use the middle term of the hierarchy of Three Ways because it is the Great Way that comprises the public face of Newar Buddhism, a public face which offers a universal path of salvation. The Diamond Way,



although higher than the Great Way when the Three Ways are enumerated in order, is in this usage included *within* the Great Way. It is thanks to the ritual authority and techniques of ritualized visualization conferred by their initiation as a priest—and this is possible only in the Vajrayāna—that the Vajrācāryas are able to evoke deities, create sacred spaces and objects, and in general carry on the priestly role for Newar Buddhists. In short, the Disciples' Way legitimates Śākyas' and Vajrācāryas' common status as married monks and the temple priests of monasteries, and the Diamond Way legitimates the Vajrācāryas' role as domestic priests. The Great Way proclaims the Buddhist message and path for all.<sup>12</sup>

The Vajrācāryas are thus the undisputed apex of the traditional Newar Buddhist hierarchy. Only the sons of Vajrācārya men by Vajrācārya or Śākya mothers may go through the ritual which makes one a priest. Nowadays all



PLATE 14. A Barber woman (Nauni) shaves the head of a Śākya boy in Kwā Bāhāh, Lalitpur, as a preliminary to the ritual of Monastic Initiation. His paternal aunt holds him while his mother looks on. It is the paternal aunt's task to collect the boy's hair and toe-nails in a ritual plate on a tripod (*thāybhū*) and to deposit them in the nearby Bagmati river. The cloth on the plate is part of the required prestation for this service. (D. N. Gellner)

those entitled to it do go through it, whether or not they intend to practise the priesthood. It is through this rite, called the Consecration of a Master, that they gain the title 'Vajrācārya', meaning 'Master of the Diamond', i.e. 'Master of the Diamond Way'. Before they go through this ritual they have to pass first through the rite of monastic initiation.<sup>13</sup> All Vajrācārya and Śākyas boys must go through this rite in order to become full, marriageable members of their caste, and only the sons of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas men by Śākyas or Vajrācāryas mothers may be so initiated. In doing so they pass four days as a monk—albeit a young one, cared for by their mother—and become registered members of their father's monastery.

In theory it is believed that if for some reason a Vajrācārya boy fails to go through the ritual of the Consecration of a Master he and his descendants fall to the status of Śākyas. It is also sometimes said that if he failed to go through monastic initiation he would fall to the level of the Urāy/Tulādhār *et al.*, though in actual practice this status is usually ascribed to the offspring of Śākyas or Vajrācāryas fathers by lower-caste mothers (cf. p. 75 n. 13). Non-honorifically the ritual of monastic initiation is called *bare chuyegu* in Newari, which means 'beginning to be a monk'. The word *bare* derives from the Sanskrit *vandya*, venerable, a term of address for Buddhist monks.<sup>14</sup> Śākyas and Vajrācāryas know that *bare* means monk and they understand the word to refer specifically to Śākyas, though they tend to avoid it because it is also used slightly by high-caste Hindus to refer indiscriminately to both Śākyas and Vajrācāryas.

If a Vajrācārya or Śākyas man marries a woman of lower caste, as occasionally happens, the offspring are not accepted as caste equals. They will either have to find others of mixed caste as marriage partners or marry into the mother's caste. Boys of such a marriage cannot be initiated in their father's monastery, which would *ipso facto* make them a member with rights equal to all other members, but may go through the ritual elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

Another example of Buddhist initiation at a *caitya* is provided by the boys of the extended family of the (relatively low) Taṇḍukār caste who are known as *nāy gubhāju*, i.e. Buddhist domestic priests for the Khaḍgī caste (see above, p. 166). The role of the *nāy gubhāju*, the distinction between Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, and the role of the Kāpālī as death priest are the three main cases where Newar Buddhism permits a segmentation of priestly functions on the grounds of caste. These three segmentations of priesthood can only really be justified in Hindu terms, that is, in terms of social hierarchy and heredity. None the less, Newar Buddhism does not go nearly as far as Hinduism in this respect, with its numerous priests, enumerated above, and other ritual specialists, whom Levy (1990) dubs para-priests.

In conclusion, then, the caste status of Śākyas is legitimated by their religious identity as married part-time monks. Vajrācāryas are *both* Tantric priests *and* married part-time monks. As Greenwold (1974a: 110) says, 'The very basis of

Newar [Buddhist] priesthood is prior ordination as a monk.' Within the monastery Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are equal in status; no distinction is made between them in the distribution of rights and duties. The only exception to this is that Vajrācāryas must fill priestly roles where these are required (this applies particularly to the worship of the Tantric deity, to the public reading of Mahāyānist scriptures, and to the officer who oversees all the ritual of the monastery). Outside the monastery, Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are ranked, the Vajrācāryas being superior, but other castes often run them together. This is considered in the next section.

#### 4. *Intra- and Inter-Caste Relations*

Socially the superiority of Vajrācāryas to Śākyas is accepted by all, but this is not a superiority of caste. It is rather a question of religious status. Even in Kathmandu, where as a result of the famous dispute between Vajrācāryas and Tulādhār *et al.* (Rosser 1966: 105–34) the Vajrācāryas turned in on themselves and seem only rarely to marry Śākyas, there is no question of Vajrācāryas refusing to eat boiled rice cooked by Śākyas. The dispute was sparked off by the Vajrācāryas' refusal to eat rice cooked by Tulādhars. That is, they decided that they had to stop doing so to emphasize the difference of caste between them. Even though most of the Śākyas eventually sided with the Tulādhars, the Vajrācāryas never considered extending the same refusal to them.

Outside of Kathmandu intermarriage between Vajrācāryas and Śākyas is common, but not as common as it would be were there no bar at all. Given the fact that Vajrācāryas are roughly one third of the total caste either a Vajrācārya or a Śākya man would, in the absence of any preference, be about twice as likely to marry a Śākya woman as a Vajrācārya woman. In fact the analysis of 430 marriages between Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in ward 15, Lalitpur, showed that Śākya men are almost four times as likely to marry Śākya women as Vajrācārya women and that Vajrācārya men are almost four times as likely to marry a Vajrācārya woman. Vajrācārya women are almost as likely to marry Śākyas as Vajrācāryas, but Śākya women—at least on the basis of this sample—are more than fourteen times as likely to marry a Śākya as a Vajrācārya. These figures bear out what informants say, that for several reasons Vajrācāryas do not like to accept Śākya brides. A priest's wife has to accompany and assist her husband at rituals, and some patrons prefer to have a Vajrācārya woman to pay respect to. A Śākya girl is less likely to be well acquainted with rituals. Finally, if a Vajrācārya is ever to give Tantric initiation, his wife must be a Vajrācārya by birth.

Quigley (1986) has argued that for Newars as a whole, isogamy is the norm; this is certainly so for Śākyas and Vajrācāryas. Some Vajrācāryas are willing to give their daughters out of the family to Śākyas, although other Vajrācāryas

criticize them for this. Fewer still are willing to reciprocate and find Śākya brides for their sons.

This raises the question of how the shortage of brides for Vajrācārya men in ward 15 is dealt with, if a significant proportion of their women are being given to Śākyas, but they themselves rarely take them in return. My survey produced some evidence that Vajrācārya women are brought in over larger distances;<sup>16</sup> this fits with Locke's figures, cited above, showing that Vajrācāryas are a smaller proportion of the caste in Lalitpur than elsewhere. Over a quarter of Vajrācārya brides come from outside Lalitpur whereas the corresponding proportion of Śākya brides is under a tenth. The figures in Table 7.1 illustrate this. They also show that almost half of the Śākya brides of Śākya men come from within the monastic community of Kwā Bāhāḥ itself. A few, while coming from outside Lalitpur, are also drawn from Kwā Bāhāḥ families. This level of marriage within the monastery is possible only because of the unusually large size of Kwā Bāhāḥ. In many small monasteries indeed endogamy is prohibited because the members are all deemed to be related patrilineally, even when precise links cannot be demonstrated.<sup>17</sup>

Table 7.2 shows what the same variables look like from the point of view of three Śākya lineages. A comparison of the first two columns of Table 7.1 and the first six columns of Table 7.2 shows that these lineages fit the general pattern well: Śākya men are at least four times as likely to marry Śākya and Vajrācārya girls; when they marry Śākya brides they come about equally from families belonging to Kwā Bāhāḥ and from families belonging to other monasteries; when they marry Vajrācārya girls they come from other monasteries far more often than from Kwā Bāhāḥ. The reason for this relative lack of Śākya–Vajrācārya unions within the monastery may be that marriage presupposes equality between the two sets of affines whereas there is a feeling that within a monastery which has both Śākya and Vajrācārya members the Śākyas ought to respect the Vajrācāryas as their priests; thus Vajrācāryas who are willing to give their daughters to Śākyas avoid giving them to Śākyas within

TABLE 7.1. *Place of origin of 430 brides of Śākya and Vajrācārya men living in ward 15, Lalitpur (in percentages)*

	Śākya brides of Śākya men (N = 263)	Vajrācārya brides of Śākya men (N = 72)	Śākya brides of Vajrācārya men (N = 19)	Vajrācārya brides of Vajrācārya men (N = 76)
Kwā Bāhāḥ members	46.4	11.1	42.1	18.4
Kwā Bāhāḥ, living outside Lalitpur	2.3	4.2	—	2.6
Lalitpur (non-Kwā B)	43.0	68.0	31.6	52.6
Outside Lalitpur	8.3	16.7	26.3	26.4
	100	100	100	100

Notes: All the men bar one are members of Kwā Bāhāḥ.

The survey revealed 15 inter-caste marriages, 4 by Vajrācāryas, 11 by Śākyas, not included here.

TABLE 7.2. *Status and place of origin of spouses in three Kwā Bāhāḥ Śākya lineages*

	Śākya brides			Vajrācārya brides			Śākya husbands			Vajrācārya husbands		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Kwā Bāhāḥ	20	15	11	1	0	0	9	2	11	1	0	0
Lalitpur (non-Kwā Bāhāḥ)	18	7	5	11	5	2	7	1	2	2	4	4
Outside Lalitpur	2	4	3	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0
	40	26	19	12	5	2	17	5	13	3	5	4

*Note:* It is harder to collect information on women, especially higher up the family tree, since it is not necessary to remember them to know how one should behave to other members of the lineage, and the affinal links created by them are no longer operative and have been forgotten. Seven inter-caste marriages were recorded: two in lineage A, one with a Tibetan, the other with a woman of unspecified caste in Darjeeling; four in lineage B, with Tāmraḥār and Rana brides, and Rañjītkār and Parbatīyā Brāhmaṇ husbands; one in lineage C, with a Tibetan wife.

their own monastery. Lineage B also illustrates how alliances get repeated. All five Vajrācārya brides and all four Lalitpur Vajrācārya husbands come from Bu Bāhāḥ. At least four of these unions can be put down to the matchmaking of one old lady, now in her 90s, who was given in marriage there: in her many years of going to and fro between her natal home in Kwā Bāhāḥ and her husband's home she has arranged for one brother's daughter to marry into her husband's locality, and for three girls from her husband's lineage to marry her brothers' sons.

In spite of the stronger preference for brides from outside the city on the part of Vajrācāryas, both Vajrācāryas and Śākyas marry more within Lalitpur than Śreṣṭhas.<sup>18</sup> All these groups marry more within the city than the inhabitants of Panauti, where a striking 83 per cent of all marriages are contracted with partners from outside (Toffin 1984: 406–7); but these unusually high figures for city exogamy must be due to the multi-caste nature, yet small size, of Panauti. Other things being equal Newars prefer to marry close at hand. The more problematic status is, the greater distance one may be prepared to go for the right alliance: hence the Śreṣṭha pattern. Small castes, however, have no choice but to marry over long distances, and all castes are evidently small in Panauti.

Apart from differences of family standing due to wealth, education, or political influence, all Vajrācāryas share the same caste status. Within the Śākyas, however, at least two grades of social status were traditionally recognized. These grades are not as many, as sharp, or as significant as those found within the Śreṣṭha caste, or even among the Tulādhār *et al.* or Maharjans. The lower group in question are those Śākyas (there are no Vajrācāryas) who are members of the monasteries called *bahī*, as opposed to the majority who are members of monasteries called *bāhāḥ*. The former constitute 8.75 per cent of the total caste in Lalitpur, 3.9 per cent in Kathmandu, and 5.3 per cent overall

TABLE 7.3. *Origin and status of 52 women married to members of Cikā Bahī, Lalitpur*

Origin	Śākya brides	Vajrācārya brides
Other <i>bahī</i>	3	—
Kwā Bāhāḥ	19	0
Other Lalitpur <i>bāhāḥ</i>	15	9
Outside Lalitpur	4	2
	41	11

*Note:* Two inter-caste marriages were recorded, one with a Śreṣṭha, one with a Russian woman.

(Locke 1985: 515). In the past they took various different surnames but today they all call themselves Śākya. In Lalitpur their inferiority is not institutionalized in any way, but in at least one Kathmandu monastery there are minor rules marking the distinction. One practical effect of this slight inferiority of status is that members of the *bahī* find it harder to acquire the marriage partners they want and in Kathmandu the members of the *bāhāḥ* justify their reluctance to marry into *bahī* by saying that the latter are the offspring of mixed-caste marriages.<sup>19</sup>

The lower status of the *bahī* should not be exaggerated, however. Figures for marriages in Cikā Bahī, given in Table 7.3, show very clearly that the lower status of the *bahī* is a very slight matter compared with the status differentiations found among Śreṣṭhas or Maharjans. The ratio of Vajrācārya brides to Śākya brides is virtually identical to that found elsewhere (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2). It is interesting, however, that although the members of Cikā Bahī clearly have close links with the Śākya members of Kwā Bāhāḥ, they have no links at all with its Vajrācāryas. Also remarkable is the fact that so few marriages are contracted with members of the other *bahī*.

Apart from this one exception—the *bahī*—and apart from the differences between Śākyas and Vajrācāryas themselves, the Vajrācārya and Śākya caste is, for its size, surprisingly homogeneous. There are some families who are marginal, but far fewer than in castes of a similar size such as the Śreṣṭhas, Maharjans, or Tulādhars *et al.* The necessity for every Śākya and Vajrācārya male to belong to a monastery, and the traditional refusal of monasteries to countenance this in the case of dubious marriages, provide a much clearer and less ambiguous criterion of caste membership than is available to other castes. Consequently, the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas lack the huge penumbra of caste members of dubious status shading off into the caste below which is particularly characteristic of the Śreṣṭhas, but is also found in other large castes. They do not have endogamous sub-castes like the Śreṣṭhas or, arguably, the Maharjans.

Other castes do indeed regard the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas as one homogeneous mass. As noted already, high-caste Hindus deny them respect by





PLATE 15. During the Buddhist festival of Pañcadān Vajrācārya and Śākya men and boys receive alms from the laity (including other Vajrācāryas and Śākyas, both male and female). Here female members of an Āwāle *guthi* from Bhelāchē, Lalitpur, worship and bow down to the feet of a Śākya man from Na Bahī as a preliminary to presenting him with rice paddy (1986). (D. N. Gellner)

calling them all *bare*. Lower castes, especially those whose domestic priest is a Vajrācārya, call them all—Śākya and Vajrācārya alike—*gubhāju*, although strictly this term applies only to Vajrācāryas. Indeed, I have heard Śākyas referred to jocularly as ‘*gubhājus* who lack the right to ring the priest’s bell’.

The respect with which other lower castes regard Śākyas and Vajrācāryas is certainly connected with their priestly role, both as temple priests in charge of popular cults, especially that of Karuṇāmaya-Matsyendranāth,<sup>20</sup> and as domestic priests whose presence is essential for all complex life-cycle rituals. Other Newars make offerings to deities controlled by Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, they offer alms to Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in their role as monks at yearly Pañcadān and at five- or twelve-yearly Samyak festivals, and they offer prestations to Vajrācārya domestic priests at important rituals, especially after death. They also have recourse to Vajrācārya priests for specific optional rituals, such as exorcisms or healing rites. The magical power of the priests’ rituals is important here, and certain Vajrācāryas inspire great faith in their Maharjan patrons. As a source of curing, charms, and occasional ‘black’ magic, some Vajrācāryas have a clientele spreading well beyond the Newars who are their ritual patrons

(*jajmān*) to include Parbatiyās and Tamangs (Bennett 1983: 179; Durkin-Longley 1982: 194).

Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are more than just religious specialists for other Newars. The relationship is also reversed. As householders, Śākyas and Vajrācāryas require domestic priests themselves, as well as other crucial specialists: the Nāpit (Barber) and Kāpālī (low-caste death specialist). The Barber was once essential for every life-cycle rite, and is still called for birth, monastic initiation, *burā jākwā* (the old-age initiation ritual), and death. The Kāpālī comes at every feast to collect a share. In return he (or sometimes she) takes food put out after death every day for seven days and performs the essential *nhaynhūmā* ceremony on the seventh day to prevent the dead person returning as a ghost; thereafter he or she returns every week till the sixth week, and then every month for a year.

These specialists pass on their patrons, just as Vajrācāryas do, as a kind of property right, so that if one's specialist dies, one must wait and see who has inherited the rights to one's patronage. In principle one cannot change one's specialist, and this is broadly true in practice. One cannot simply call another without risk of alienating all Barbers, priests, or whoever. All the same, in a climate of Hinduization, some Śreṣṭha and would-be Śreṣṭha families do switch from Vajrācāryas to Brāhmaṇ priests (who are only too happy to replace them). This has occurred in Sankhu in this century (Rosser 1966: 104) and among many immigrants to Kathmandu. In many cases this means Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇs, since there are so few Rājopādhyāyas. One Vajrācārya informant claimed that the same rules do not apply to Vajrācāryas themselves and that they could change their domestic priest if they did not get on with him; but one should have a priest from the same monastery as oneself. A Śākya from Kwā Bāhāḥ said that the king had once offered his ancestor a boon and he chose to change his domestic priest from a Kwā Bāhāḥ Vajrācārya to one from Bu Bāhāḥ; they have to use a Kwā Bāhāḥ priest for rituals in Kwā Bāhāḥ itself, however. This story, while purporting to show that one *can* change one's domestic priest, in fact illustrates how hard it is, since the change is only legitimated by the highest judicial authority, the king.

These ritual ties have certainly become looser in recent years. Other occupations pay much better and seem equally secure. In many cases low-caste specialists are keen to abandon the profession associated with their low caste. The fee offered to them, which is thought of as a kind of payment for work done, is not called *dakṣiṇā* as the fee for priestly services is, but just *dā* ('money'). Like the priest's *dakṣiṇā* it is not supposed to be haggled over. In practice, negotiation does sometimes take place, if only because inflation makes old customary payments unacceptable; in my experience, however, Vajrācāryas do not haggle or negotiate.<sup>21</sup> It is certain that the income for all ritual specialists has declined, both because the number of rituals performed has declined drastically and because the amounts offered have not increased with inflation.



There is another kind of specialist required by high castes, including Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in their role as householders, who is not a ritual specialist as such, and that is the Farmer (Jyāpu, i.e. Maharjan). The duties of the tenant farmer are described above (Ch. 5). High castes feel hard done by, since they receive so much less from their land than they used to before Land Reform. They complain constantly of their tenants' cheating them. The tenants themselves are much better off, and less penurious, than they used to be. The increased strength of the tenants is certainly one factor in the landlords' increasing tendency to convert their assets into houses or shops on rent. In spite of these radical changes in the economic relationship, the ritual services of the tenant continue: the tenant farmer continues to be sent as a messenger on important ritual occasions and his wife or daughter to be present at weddings as a chaperone for the bride.

Other castes are present only on a paid basis. An Untouchable may be paid to sweep an enclosed courtyard. There is no tailoring caste, as in the Nepalese hills; indeed many Vajrācāryas and some Śākyas are themselves tailors. Under the Ranas castes were forbidden to practise professions which were specific to some other caste. Nowadays anyone may practise, say, religious painting, once reserved for Citrakārs; and an old Śākya man told me that he would call a Śākya to paint the statue in his god-room 'and feed one of our own' rather than a Citrakār.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. Kinship

The caste identity of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas is, as described, unique among Newars. They stand outside the four *varṇas* and are different from other Newars. Their socio-religious status sets them apart, and others rarely imitate them, unless they have contracted a marriage with one of them. By contrast, their kinship system is basically the same as that of other Newars; it provides a common idiom.

Traditionally Śākyas and Vajrācāryas lived in households, based on joint or nuclear families, grouped in patrilineages. The household was and is defined as those who share the same cooking hearth (*bhutu*). The definition of the lineage is more problematic. Kinship is of course an idiom in which social relationships are expressed. Two families may be closely related in fact but after a bad quarrel may refuse to observe any of the rituals incumbent upon close relatives. A close kin relationship is thereby denied, and if the quarrel is not healed, the two families eventually come to be regarded as separate lineages who simply remember that they are related and therefore avoid intermarriage. A further complicating factor is that many lineages no longer express their solidarity ritually, not because they are on bad terms but because it no longer seems important to them. At the same time, a minority of prestigious lineages main-

tain an exemplary ritual solidarity. In this heterogeneous situation the model of the 'modern' 'independent' nuclear family is used by some to justify breaking away from their kin. Others continue to acknowledge the old ideal but claim that under modern conditions it is no longer practicable. For most Śākya and Vajrācāryas today the costs (in time, money, and friction) of publicly demonstrated lineage solidarity outweigh the benefits.

Śākya and Vajrācārya lineages are identified by nicknames such as 'dog-face', 'clove', 'humpback', 'crossroads', and so on. These nicknames do not have the same public recognition as lineage names in Dhulikhel or Bhaktapur. Among Śākya and Vajrācāryas no one, with the exception of the Dhakhwas, who do so precisely as a mark of pride in their lineage, would ever write them down. But they are not quite as disapproved of as Ishii describes for the village of Satungal (see above, p. 138). They are an essential shorthand and mnemonic where people have to keep track of a large number of caste fellows many of whom have identical personal names.

The term used for lineage is *phuki*.<sup>23</sup> Three categories of *phuki* are recognized. Distant (*tāpā*) *phuki* refers to those whom one remembers to be distant patrilineal relations although the exact link is not remembered. This may include those with the same lineage nickname who (unlike those not sharing the same name) will observe minimal restrictions on each other's death (for example, avoiding eating rice till the body has been taken away). The term 'distant lineage' may also be used to refer to those belonging to another named lineage with whom an agnatic relationship is remembered, but in this case not even these minimal restrictions are observed.

The second category is the lineage proper: *phuki* (without qualification). Alternative names for this are *dāju-kijā* ('brothers') or *śikay bukay hwāpī* ('those who stick together at birth and death', i.e. observe seven days' restrictions after the death of all adult members). This group must observe lineage deity worship together and also worship together at Mohanī (Dasaī) and Disī Pūjā. Large numbers may make it difficult and expensive for the whole lineage to have a feast together. In that case they may eat together only at lineage deity worship, and on other occasions the ritual may be performed on the whole lineage's behalf by specified individuals who send out blessings (*prasād*) to each household. When a girl is given out in marriage, she must give betel nuts to all members of her natal lineage before she leaves, and then on arrival at her husband's home to all members of her new lineage. This is a sign that she has left the lineage she was born in and that the lineage of her husband has accepted her as a new member. (There are also special ceremonies of introduction to the lineage deity and to the Tantric shrine at the times of their worship.) If she has not given betel nuts, or if her husband's kin refuse to accept them from her (because, for example, she is of the wrong caste), they are under no obligation to come and help cremate her or to observe any mourning on her death.

The third category of lineage is the 'marrow' or 'inner' lineage (*syā phuki*). This comprises immediate relatives: the families of brothers, half-brothers, fathers' brothers and their children (i.e. first cousins). These close relatives must observe forty-five days of pollution-cum-mourning after the death of an adult. The household of the dead person observes it for a whole year.

It will be noticed how these observances increase with the closeness of one's relation to the dead person.<sup>24</sup> Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are well aware that the purpose of these ritual practices is to express social relations. They often explain how closely they are related to someone by saying, for example, 'We have to leave off wearing a cap for seven days if he dies.' They also distinguish real from socially acknowledged kinship. After a severe quarrel, as already noted, they may refuse to observe restrictions on the death of a brother or cousin, thus denying kinship with him or his family.<sup>25</sup>

In many cases the lineage proper and the 'inner' lineage are the same, as is also noted by Ishii for Satungal (above, p. 138). Everyone else with whom they remember a patrilineal relation is simply 'distant' lineage. But this is by no means always the case. A well-known example of a cohesive lineage, divided into five sections (*kamah*) descended from five brothers, are the Dhakhwas. They are proud enough of their descent to use their lineage name, which means 'drum-face', as their surname, unlike all other Śākyas, who simply call themselves 'Śākya'. The Dhakhwas now count nine generations (inclusively) from apical ancestor to youngest member and comprise fifty households. All fifty households consider each other to be of the same lineage, but not 'marrow' lineage. They own considerable assets collectively with which they fund the rituals they perform together.<sup>26</sup>

Nowadays there is a tendency for what was probably just one stage in the developmental cycle of the lineage to become a permanent condition. That is, for the 'inner' lineage to be regarded as one's lineage: for most purposes the larger grouping, the lineage proper, is disregarded. Certainly there are many lineages which now no longer perform lineage deity worship together, and which have abandoned other regular group rituals, and therefore no longer observe compulsory restrictions on death. The group rituals were essentially Tantric ones. The lineage maintained a single Tantric shrine (*āgā*) where these rituals were performed and even sometimes built a special house (*āgā chē*) for it. The emphasis on secrecy, and perhaps also its emphasis on the symbolism of male-female complementarity, made Vajrayānist rites ideal for expressing the solidarity of kin. The decline of the lineage can be measured by the very marked decline of such Tantric rituals.<sup>27</sup>

A similar relaxation of kin ties is evident if one looks at rules of exogamy. When one asks Śākyas or Vajrācāryas whom they are debarred from marrying on grounds of kinship or affinity, the answer is usually that one may not marry anyone within seven generations (*pustā*) on either side. In theory, since one counts inclusively, everyone up to fifth cousins is excluded, counting through

women (i.e. counting affines and affines of affines) as well as men. In fact the seven generations rule is just a rule of thumb; or, more precisely, it is the most widely known and cited—but at the same time the most vague and imprecise—first line of defensive legitimization. In practice *any* remembered patrilineal relation is forbidden. On the female side the prohibition only works if it is remembered, so that in many cases—either when counting affines of affines or if the affines possess no lineage solidarity—about five generations are operative.

Very small Newar castes or sub-castes have to permit intermarriage within four or five generations on the mother's side. Such groups are often accused—unjustly—of marrying their mother's brother's daughter 'like Tamangs'. Śākyas and Vajrācāryas do not tolerate such unions but at the margins there is none the less considerable variation in the way transgressions are dealt with. In one case, dating from about twenty years ago, the families refused to accept the marriage of a man and woman from different lineages which were remembered to be related. They eloped and had a child together. Subsequently the husband died and so did the child. The woman's family refused to have her back and she committed suicide. In another case I heard of, a woman left the husband to whom she had been given in marriage for a man whose mother's brother belonged to her natal lineage. Because her natal home and the new husband's MB both belong to a large and cohesive lineage that still performs rituals together, the union has not been accepted, even though more than seven generations separate the couple. Even after twenty years of marriage, the woman is not accepted back into her natal home and her children 'have no mother's brother'.

On the other hand, the collection of the genealogy of lineage A cited in Table 7.2 above revealed two cases which contrast with such severity. In the first, one man of the lineage married a woman of the same named lineage, but since she was 'distant' lineage, and more than seven generations had passed, the marriage was accepted. In the second case, the couple were related through their mothers' brothers five generations back, but the marriage was accepted because, it was argued, such strict restrictions were now unnecessary in a modern 'democratic' age. In marginal cases, what is permitted only emerges if the rules are tested. When I asked if members of a lineage, which is remembered to be agnatically related to the Dhakhwas and performs lineage deity worship on the same day in Kwā Bāhāḥ, could intermarry with them, I was told: 'Who can say? It hasn't happened yet.'

One of the ways in which the solidarity of the lineage has been undermined is by changes to traditional rules of inheritance. Previously daughters had no right to inherit family property. If they were unmarried they had, and still have, the right to be supported; when married they have the right to a dowry and to various forms of ritual, material, and emotional support from their brothers thereafter. A woman and her children have to be invited to all big feasts in her

natal home.<sup>28</sup> In the past this occurred eight or more times a year. Even today she must be invited, with her husband (who rarely comes), between two and four times a year.<sup>29</sup> In the early years of marriage she may come for a festival and stay long periods. After the birth of a child she spends a month in her natal home. And at every life-cycle ritual through which she or her children pass her brothers have to 'send a load' (*ku chwayegu*) of food, worship materials, and beaten rice. On many occasions the mother's brother must also present children with a new set of clothes. Traditionally he gave his niece a sheep or a goat as part of her dowry, in addition to the jewellery and household items (brass waterpots, worship materials) which she receives from her family and lineage.

There is one custom which might well be interpreted as showing that high-caste Buddhists give higher status than Hindus to a married woman. For the ritual of Kijā Pūjā (younger brother worship) Śākya and Vajrācārya men have to go to the house of their married elder sister, whereas among Śreṣṭhas the woman has to return to her natal home. On one level this merely reflects the self-differentiation of Buddhists and Hindus, who frequently invert each other's practices. All the same, in the Hindu case since the woman comes, it can be argued that this indicates her inferiority (cf. Bennett 1983: 150); this is also the normal practice among Parbatīyās.

None the less, it is probable that only Newar Brāhmaṇs have followed the hypergamous and filiafocal Hindu ideology described so well for the Parbatīyās by Bennett (1983). Newars in general have adopted the Hindu filiafocal ideology and hypergamy only in isolated ritual contexts and not in their social practices.<sup>30</sup> The *practice* of most Newars was and remains isogamic. Exchanges between affines are not hierarchical.

In recent years there have been several attempts to codify and set a maximum limit to all ritual exchanges and expenditures. The Śākyas and Vajrācāryas of Lalitpur issued two rule-books (*niyamāvalī*), in 1975 and 1979, to regulate all complex rituals.<sup>31</sup> The second one was drawn up in order to comply with new laws passed in the interim by the government, which was trying to prevent the extreme and competitive extravagance displayed by many people, especially at weddings. The booklets were drawn up by a committee with representatives from all the monasteries of Lalitpur. In the matter of the number of guests invited to weddings, the rules have been honoured in the breach, often—as people are quick to point out—by the very representatives who drew up the rules. At a higher and more extravagant level, the same is true of government ministers.

Although these rules are often ignored at weddings, there has, as prescribed by the rule-books, been a diminution in the duties expected of a mother's brother towards his sister's children. At the same time, women have acquired greater rights in their natal home. By law a woman can now inherit an equal share of the family property if she remains unmarried till the age of 35. In

practice, those—relatively rare—women who resist the pressures to get married do not claim a separate share if they have brothers; this would meet with very strong disapproval and I know of no case of its happening. However, the law has had an important effect where there are no sons: an unmarried daughter can now inherit, where previously the property would have passed to her father's brothers. Furthermore, a widow can now inherit her husband's property when they have no children and leave it in her will to relatives on her side. Both of these trends have increased the power of the immediate family, and improved the position of women, at the expense of the lineage. It is not surprising therefore that lineage solidarity is on the decline.

## 6. Guthis and the Lineage

So far nothing has been said about Śākya and Vajrācārya *guthis*. I have discussed these in detail elsewhere (Gellner 1992: ch. 8). Here I will focus on those aspects of *guthi* organization which relate to the foregoing discussion of caste identity and kinship.

The Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are too numerous to have a *guthi* which regulates the affairs of the entire caste. When the *guthi* of Kathmandu Vajrācāryas tried to behave like a caste-council *guthi* during the famous dispute with the Tulādhār *et al.* it was quite unable to impose its will, and was eventually humiliated. To this day it has alienated the respect and support of a large number of—often rich and influential—Buddhists. Other more consensual attempts at collective action have been no more successful. The rule-books drawn up by the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas of Lalitpur, referred to above, relied on goodwill to be implemented. Once distributed, they have in fact been largely unread and ignored.

The three types of *guthi* which are really significant for the functioning of Śākya and Vajrācārya life are the death *guthi*, *guthis* for the worship of a particular deity, and the lineage deity *guthi*. The last-named exists wherever there is a degree of lineage solidarity. Household heads take turns to organize the annual lineage deity worship and other rituals and then pass them on to the next in line just as in other *guthis*. However, since most Śākyas and Vajrācāryas no longer co-operate with their lineage, most of them do not belong to a lineage deity *guthi*. They perform their lineage deity worship in single families or groups of families who are 'inner' lineage.

In Lalitpur, the death *guthi* is still considered essential. By contrast, Toffin (1984: 399 n. 3) found in Panauti that for 24 per cent of households—all from small castes—death *guthis* were defunct. Every Lalitpur Śākya and Vajrācārya head of household belongs to some death *guthi* which will come and cremate any member of his family. The only exception occurs after a separation of a joint family. If this occurs after a father dies, the eldest brother automatically



inherits the father's place. The younger brothers have to apply for entry. They will be given several years' grace during which their father's *guthi* will still come in the event of a death even though they have not yet formally applied for entry. Some death *guthis* are based on a lineage. In the past it was probably normal for all members of a lineage to belong to one death *guthi*, although usually others could belong as well. Traditionally also all Śākyas and Vajrācāryas made use of Maharjan cremation specialists (Gwā or Gwāt). Nowadays more than half of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas have given up employing these specialists, mainly because of the cost, and they burn the dead themselves. Because of this, and because of greater movement from one part of the city to another, death *guthis* are now nearly all defined by the locality in which they are centred and not by kinship.

*Guthis* for the worship of a particular deity are very numerous. Common examples are those *guthis* which ensure an annual performance of the observance of Vasundharā, *guthis* which erect an image of Indra during Yēnyāḥ, or *guthis* for the monthly worship of Karuṇāmaya-Matsyendranāth. Many other



PLATE 16. The annual monastic community feast (*saṃghabhajana*, *sambhmay*) of Kwā Bāhāḥ, Lalitpur, held in the courtyard of Ilā Nani behind the monastic temple compound, after the reconsecration of its principal divinities. Participation is restricted exclusively to Śākyas and Vajrācāryas who have been initiated in Kwā Bāhāḥ. There are so many members that even with many not attending, there have to be three sittings. (D. N. Gellner)

similar rites—the annual reconsecration of a *caitya* or a special Tantric worship in Kwā Bāhāḥ—are carried out as part of the duties of lineage deity *guthis*. The possession of a large number of such *guthis* is an expression of the religious vocation of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas as a whole.

The most important *guthi* for Śākyas and Vajrācāryas is not the death *guthi* or the lineage deity *guthi* but the monastery. It is not actually called a *guthi* but it functions like a super-*guthi*.<sup>32</sup> It focuses on the cult of a patron deity attached to a particular place. It has a fixed and hereditary membership. Duties are carried out by rotation. There is an annual feast. Unlike many *guthis*, large monasteries have extensive buildings and landholdings, but this is just a difference of degree. The only difference of kind is that in main monasteries and in *bahī*, worship is encouraged from all comers. In other words, these monasteries have universalist pretensions and are not purely private associations for the benefit of their members. This is not true of what I call lineage monasteries, which are therefore precisely like *guthis*.<sup>33</sup>

Toffin (1984: 177) has stressed the fact that *guthi* organization cannot be reduced to, i.e. understood purely in terms of, kinship, caste, or locality. It is certainly true that membership in many *guthis* is not determined by any one of these three factors on its own. This does not mean, however, that there is no connection between them and *guthi* membership. Most *guthis* are mono-caste (*guthis* for the worship of Karuṇāmaya-Matsyendranāth and for Yēnyāḥ are the commonest exceptions). Membership in the monastery, as we have seen, is determined both by caste and by descent. Death *guthis* are restricted to members of the same caste and in many cases used also to be based on kinship. The solidarity of the lineage was, and sometimes still is, expressed and enforced by the lineage deity *guthi*. In short, *guthi* organization is a powerful tool both for preserving caste status and for structuring the patrilineage.

In his pioneering study of the Newars Gopal Singh Nepali (1965: 191–2) wrote that

While caste or sub-caste sets the limit to the general status position of a person in the total society, his ritual and social life is regulated and controlled through these ‘guthi’ institutions . . . In the event of sanctions imposed by any one of these ‘guthis’, the social living of a defaulting household becomes quite miserable. Of these *guthis*, the principal ones whose sanctions are most dreaded by the Newars are the ‘Sana-guthi’ [death *guthi*] and the ‘Dewali’ or ‘Deya’ [lineage deity] *guthi*.

As we have seen, this is no longer true. The lineage deity *guthis* of many Śākyas and Vajrācāryas have atrophied, and where they exist they are not feared. The death *guthi* is still considered essential. It is the sanction of this and even more, as suggested above, the sanction of monastery-membership which still have power over Śākyas and Vajrācāryas and make them anxious to contract correct marriages. It is the existence of monasteries which makes it possible to know which marriages are correct. Thus monasteries play the crucial role guarantee-



ing a Śākya or Vajrācārya's status, a function performed for other Newars by death and lineage deity *guthis* (Quigley 1984: 237; 1986: 91).

One further speculation may be warranted: Was there traditionally relatively greater freedom of manoeuvre in the big cities than in small towns or villages? The close control in ritual and social matters that a lineage could exact from its members is clearly on the decline. Some Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are probably less afraid to offend their colleagues in a monastery, by non-participation in its activities, than they would have been in the past. Yet it seems likely that even in the past the sanctions of lineages were not quite as dreaded in the cities as in Dhulikhel (as described by Quigley) or in Panga (which G. S. Nepali was probably thinking of). In small and marginal endogamous groups, like the Śreṣṭhas of Dhulikhel, the threat of expulsion is particularly effective. In the large castes of the cities, even though lineage membership was certainly important in the past, there may well have been more possible strategies for coping with exclusion. In the case of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas, as long as they maintained membership of their monastery, they could still find marriage partners, even if on bad terms with their kin.

## 7. Conclusion: From Holy Order to Quasi-Ethnic Group

So far I have sketched a picture of decline: declining importance of the lineage and declining vitality of traditional caste relationships. What has been taking their place? A sense of common origin and common culture under threat—a mixture often characteristic of minority ethnic groups in the modern world. Because the criteria of religion and language appeal to different groups, the former excluding those included by the latter, and to some extent vice versa also, Śākya and Vajrācārya self-awareness, though being 'substantialized' in Dumont's terms, can only approach a kind of ethnic identity. Hence the neologism 'quasi-ethnic group'.

The religious services traditionally provided by Śākyas and Vajrācāryas for other Newars have come under attack from several directions. There are two alternative forms of Buddhism on offer to the Buddhist laity: Tibetan Buddhism and Theravāda Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism has been present in the Valley for many centuries. Many Newar Buddhists who are very serious about their religion—either in wishing to follow the celibate path themselves or in wishing to have instruction in the philosophical teachings of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism—have taken Tibetan teachers and begun to do their devotions in Tibetan. Many Śākyas who used to trade in Tibet have been influenced in this way. Tibetan Buddhism has not had a strong influence on other Newars. Its influence has been largely negative: it has siphoned off many of the talented followers of Newar Buddhism who might otherwise have attempted to change it from within. Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal is a very

different kettle of fish. Present only since the 1930s, its practitioners are explicit proselytizers. They are modernists who offer a form of Buddhism that is simpler, cheaper, more rational, more comprehensible, and more egalitarian than traditional Newar Buddhism. A small number of Śākyas and even fewer Vajrācāryas are aggressive partisans of this form of Buddhism. About half tend to ignore it and the rest support all three forms of Buddhism.<sup>34</sup>

There is also competition from non-Buddhist sources. Hinduism is the official religion of Nepal and there is a clear trend among Śreṣṭhas who traditionally used Buddhist priests, as well as among upwardly mobile members of other castes, to switch to Hindu domestic priests and Hindu forms of optional piety (see Rosser 1966). There seems to have been a great increase of regularized possession in the last thirty or forty years: Vajrācāryas have greater competition from these mediums, as well as from Western medicine, in offering cures for illness and other means to deal with misfortune (Gellner 1994). Finally, there is competition for the allegiance of the young from various new religions now present in the Kathmandu Valley: Sai Baba, the Japanese Reiyūkai, and even Rajneesh.

In the past Śākyas and Vajrācāryas took their religious vocation seriously. Śākya and Vajrācārya men were always shaven headed (Kirkpatrick 1975: 184; Oldfield 1981: ii. 77, 139). Even recently they shaved their heads at every religious ceremony. This is now restricted to deaths and observances (*vrata*). A Śākya and Vajrācārya who shaved his head to get married today would be laughed at. In the past Śākyas and Vajrācāryas chanted Buddhist hymns while working as artisans. Today young Śākyas and Vajrācāryas go to school and to Hindi movies with everyone else. They find the content of their traditional identity—as priests and monks—embarrassing. The gap between them and other Newars has narrowed. Increasingly both Śākyas and Vajrācāryas see their obligations in the monastery as a burdensome duty.

There has also been a decline in the specific priestly vocation of Vajrācāryas. In the past almost all Vajrācārya men would know how to perform at least the basic rituals, even if they had no parishioners of their own, so that they could assist or participate on other occasions. This was a natural expression of their priestly status. Now few young Vajrācāryas learn how to do the rituals. In general, only one son of those families which cannot afford to abandon their parishioners takes up the priesthood. Of a sample of 114 Vajrācārya adult males in ward 15, Lalitpur, only 22 per cent practised as priests and only 4.4 per cent lived from that alone. The decline of the priesthood can be measured by the fact that nowadays only a third of all Vajrācāryas take Tantric initiation (necessary for all esoteric rites) whereas in the past it was almost universal. Among Śākyas also there has been a large falling off, from about two-thirds to about a tenth. Young Vajrācāryas complain that their friends make fun of them if they perform rituals. All Vajrācāryas complain that they no longer receive the respect that they used to and that the stipend offered—still the same as years ago—is

scant reward for the long training required and the long hours spent fasting during the ritual. Better by far to gain a modern education and the easy, secure, and more respected life of the government employee.<sup>35</sup>

There has also been an important economic factor in the decline of the Śākya and Vajrācārya religious vocation. Many of the endowments which supported their religious activities have been lost, and where they have not the income has been drastically reduced because of the legally stated requirements instituted by Land Reform in 1964. As Locke (1985: 14–16) has described, the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas have no tradition, unlike many other landlords, of actively seeking out tenants and ensuring that rent in kind was paid and paid in full. This is particularly true of land held by monasteries and *guthis*. They relied on the tenants' good faith and this very fact suggests that in the past the tenant farmers genuinely respected the religious authority of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas. Keeping up their traditional rituals has required the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas to dig deep into their own pockets and it is hardly surprising that there has been a continual paring down.

The one crucial difference which remains between the Śākya and Vajrācārya caste and other Newars is that the Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are unequivocally Buddhist. It is not open to them, as it is to all other Newars, to be Hindu in their private devotions. They may say that Buddhism and Hinduism are all one, they may even—though this is rare—write their religion as 'Hindu' in the census, but it would be unthinkable for them to take up Hindu rituals. For all other Newars, with the arguable exception of the Tulādhār *et al.*, it is by contrast extremely 'thinkable' and indeed often occurs.

Śākyas and Vajrācāryas have started to behave in some degree like an ethnic group defined by their Buddhism. Of course there are many Buddhists who are not Śākyas and Vajrācāryas and all self-conscious and active Buddhists must, as Buddhists, appeal to all men and women regardless of ethnicity. Furthermore, the other obvious criterion for ethnic identity, language (together with culture) cuts across the Buddhist criterion since most Newars are, at least nominally, Hindu. The language is in fact the focus of modern ethnic Newar mobilization. Language activists and Buddhist activists are often working at cross purposes.<sup>36</sup>

None the less, for young Śākyas and Vajrācāryas their Buddhist identity and their Newar identity reinforce each other and are seen by them as aspects of the same predicament (cf. Plate 13). The conflict of the religious and the language-cum-culture means that they cannot ever become an autonomous ethnic group. But like many large castes in India, they tend in that direction.

As Buddhists, Śākyas and Vajrācāryas feel a disadvantaged minority in the scramble for jobs and influence in which all in Kathmandu are obliged to participate to some extent. The number of Buddhists recorded in the decennial census regularly declines; Buddhism was officially considered as a 'branch of Hinduism' under the Panchayat regime and put on a par with Jainism and

Sikhism, religions with no significant following or historical presence in Nepal. Both of these facts are frequently and emotively discussed by young and modern-educated Śākyas and Vajrācāryas. It is clear that what they are discussing is their survival as a quasi-ethnic group.

One suggestion, frequently made, is that in order to increase their numbers Śākyas and Vajrācāryas should begin to give monastic initiation to all who wish it, as their own myths of origin claim once to have been the case, even in Nepal. At least, and more practically, it is suggested that they should permit sons of Śākyas and Vajrācāryas by lower-caste wives to be initiated in the monastery of their father (cf. Riley-Smith 1982: 39; L. B. Shakyas 1984: 27–8). In Kathmandu one powerful Śākya, whose wife is a Parbatiyā Brāhmaṇ, managed to have his son initiated. The monastery in question now permits half-caste boys to become members and enter the main shrine, but for the moment still excludes them from the Tantric shrine. Some other monasteries in Kathmandu also permit this. In another new development a special monastery was set up in February 1979 in Teku Doban for thirty such boys (C. Vajracharya 1983: 10–11). Although the possibility of taking similar steps in Lalitpur was discussed at public meetings in 1989, so far no such steps have been taken there.

These innovations fall short of establishing a Śākya and Vajrācārya caste association. In Nepal there have to my knowledge been very few moves to set up such caste associations.<sup>37</sup> In India they emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, partly in response to the decennial censuses of the British administration (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 52). As Khare has emphasized (1970: 91), they are essentially modern institutions, emphasizing individual achievements in modern contexts, modern styles of organization (which ignore intra-caste divisions), modern forms of altruism (social service etc.), and modernist reinterpretations of traditional religion. In Nepal there have emerged various language and cultural associations. Where the cultural group is in effect a caste (the so-called tribes, such as Gurungs, Magars, Tamangs, etc.) these groups might be thought to operate in effect as caste organizations. But this is hardly the case: these cultural organizations are the preserve of intellectuals, largely ignored by the majority. In the interests of their own survival they had until 1990 to emphasize their purely cultural, and non-political, nature. The government sought to discourage caste feeling by not recording caste or ethnicity in the census (but only mother tongue, which is not the same thing). One of the justifications frequently given for the system of Partyless Democracy in force until 1990 was precisely that it discouraged communalism. All the same, elections were occasions for heightened caste feeling, even though unofficially. Śākyas and Vajrācāryas were indeed successful in elections at the local level, particularly in Lalitpur, where they are so numerous. However, they are not sufficiently numerous or influential to have any significant impact at national elections, although they evidently hoped that they would in 1986. By 1991, with the introduction of parties, it was rather a

question of Congress versus Communist, and the large Maharjan vote was directly mobilized for the Communist candidate, who was a Maharjan.

Śākya and Vajrācāryas show greater solidarity than other Newar castes of comparable size. Ishii (1987) has pointed out that, in spite of the decline of traditional inter-caste solidarity in the Newar village he studied, and in spite of the severe conflicts both between and within castes sparked off by modern political arrangements, the Śreṣṭhas and the Maharjans there show no sign of establishing caste solidarity over long distances. I suggest that for Śākya and Vajrācāryas their Buddhism has indeed provided a focus whereby such solidarity is expressed through committees, magazines, building meeting-halls, and so on. But unlike the Indian castes organized in this manner, it is surreptitious. And to that extent Śākya and Vajrācārya identity has only approached closer to that of an ethnic group than other Newar castes. For the reasons alluded to above, it will surely never attain the full-fledged political forms so characteristic of minority ethnic groups in the modern world, nor even, I suspect, the level of explicit and self-consciously caste-based organization sometimes found in modern urban India.

### Notes

1. See Hodgson (1972: part I: 66–7), Lévi (1905: i. 28), Locke (1980: 67–70, 446–9), Lienhard (1984), and Snellgrove (1987: 375). Cf. Weber (1958a: 282).
2. Lévi (1905: i. 226) and Greenwold (1974a); cf. Oldfield (1981: ii. 144), Locke (1980: 450), and Snellgrove (1987: 376).
3. 'Traditionally' here means since approximately the fourteenth century. See below for the recent competition from Tibetan and Theravāda Buddhisms. See Bradford (1985) for the Lingayats, and Carrithers (1991: 283–5) on the Jains.
4. See Bouillier (1979) on married renouncers in the Nepalese hills. On the Newar (low) caste of Śaivite married renouncers, the Kāpālī, see below, Ch. 9. See Gellner (1992: 63) for a translation of the Buddhist chronicle mentioned, which is mistranslated in Wright (1972: 185). This passage has been much quoted. On the internal homogeneity of the Śākya and Vajrācāryas when compared to other Newar castes, see p. 221.
5. See Dumont (1980: appendix B), Heesterman (1985: ch. 2), Parry (1980), Das (1982: ch. 2), Fuller (1984: ch. 3), and van der Veer (1985). Bennett (1983: 251) has also pointed out a parallel between consanguineal women and Brāhmaṇs in Hinduism, both of whom are recipients of sacred 'fees' (*dakṣiṇā*) and both of whom embody spiritual—as opposed to political and economic—power.
6. In Bhaktapur and surrounding areas the *ghaṇṣū ācā* is known as a Śivācārya (Tinī) and also acts as the domestic priest of the Mahābrāhmaṇa death priests (Toffin 1987: 220).
7. Locke (1985: 515). This figure is in fact only an approximation since the figures for some of the individual monasteries were only estimates. In addition, boys are initiated all the time, and there is no single central record of this fact, so the figures are constantly in flux.

8. The 'villages' category includes Kirtipur and Thimi. I have adjusted the totals given at Locke (1985: 515), where for historical reasons the monasteries of Cobhar and Kirtipur and the *bahī* of Bungamati are included in the Lalitpur totals.
9. One has to exercise great caution in extrapolating from the figures of membership in monasteries to figures for residency. Although most Śākyas and Vajrācāryas attached to Lalitpur monasteries still live in Lalitpur, a considerable number have moved to the suburbs or to Kathmandu.
10. See Greenwold (1974a) and Gellner (1992: 263–6) for fuller accounts of Śākya and Vajrācārya employment patterns.
11. More precisely this means, apart from Vajrācāryas and Śākyas themselves, the Śreṣṭhas in Lalitpur and the Tulādhar *et al.* in Kathmandu. This refers to the full Tantric initiation of Cakrasaṃvara. There are other Tantric initiations, including ones available to lower castes for specific purposes (for details see Gellner 1992).
12. The argument of the last few paragraphs is necessarily very compressed. It is presented in full, with supporting evidence, in Gellner (1992).
13. On these two rituals see Hodgson (1972: i. 139–45), Locke (1975; 1980: 41–50), M. R. Allen (1973), and Gellner (1988a; forthcoming b).
14. All that needs to be said about the etymology of the word *bare* is summarized in Lienhard (1989).
15. In effect this means that they have to go through monastic initiation at a *caitya* (Buddhist cult object), thus making them members of no monastery. See below, Section 6, for some changes to the traditional pattern which have occurred in Kathmandu.
16. A second way in which the Vajrācāryas of ward 15 make up the shortfall may well be by marrying Vajrācāryas from other monasteries, such as Ha Bāhāḥ, whose members do not themselves have such a strong preference for Vajrācārya brides, because they do not practise as priests.
17. Thus Fürer-Haimendorf (1965: 24) was incorrect to say that 'ideally a *baha* constitutes an exogamous unit'. If a monastery (*bāhāḥ* or *bahī*) is exogamous this has nothing to do with ideals of how monasteries should be run. It simply reflects rules of patrilineal exogamy shared with other Newars.
18. My evidence here is that 16 out of 42 marriages recorded in ward 15 (38%) were with partners from outside Lalitpur. Quigley gives similar figures for Kathmandu Śreṣṭhas (above, Ch. 3).
19. On the *bahī* see Locke (1985: 185 f. and 375 f.) and Gellner (1987: 382–98, 408–12). On the various titles used by different groups of Śākyas, in the *bahī* and elsewhere, see Locke (1980: 21–2) and Gellner (1989b; 1992: 165).
20. On this cult see Locke (1980) and Owens (1989). M. R. Allen (1973) emphasized the role of such popular cults in preserving Nepalese Buddhism.
21. On the theory of *dakṣiṇā* see Heesterman (1959) and Malamoud (1976). Vajrācāryas in Bhaktapur are said to have specified fees and this is given as the reason for most of the peasants there switching to Brāhmaṇ priests in the last fifty years (Locke 1985: 509 n. 3). Such reasons need to be treated with caution, since they may hide more conscious Hinduizing notions. In any case, the middle-ranking peasants of Bhaktapur were already closer to Hinduism than those of Kathmandu or Lalitpur, since they often use a class of peasant Karmācāryas (Jyāpu Ācā) (Levy 1990; for Pyangaon and Theco, see Toffin 1984: 155–6, 184, 204 n. 8; cf. Toffin

- 1987: 219). According to Fuller (1984: 69), Brāhmaṇ family priests in Tamil Nadu 'nearly always bargain over their fees'.
22. In India also a decline in *jajmānī* relations has led to stronger feelings of caste solidarity and competition with others (see e.g. O. Lewis 1958: 83–4).
  23. See Toffin (1984: 82 n. 14) on the Tibeto-Burman origin of this word. It has passed into Nepali but is used by Parbatiyās for what Newars would call 'distant' lineage (Bennett 1983: 21).
  24. For further details of Śākya and Vajrācārya practices at death, including their observance of only seven, not ten or thirteen, days of mourning like other high castes, see Gellner (1992: 204–13). Other Newars make the same three distinctions, but they name them in slightly different ways, which conflict with the usages described here (for high castes in Panauti, see Toffin 1984: 389; compare this volume, pp. 142–5, 197).
  25. See Toffin (1984: 103) and Quigley (1984: 156) for other Newars, and Blustain (1977: 57) for Parbatiyās doing the same. A. P. Caplan (1972: 79) describes Parbatiyās in west Nepal manipulating the mourning period for political purposes.
  26. For details of these see Gellner (1992: 224–5).
  27. On these Tantric rituals, see Gellner (1992: 242–3, 282–92).
  28. This is called *nakhatyā* (lit. 'festival and a half') and usually occurs the day after the festival because a woman must be at her husband's home for the festival itself. Just occasionally (e.g. at Yēnyāḥ, Indra Jātrā, in Lalitpur) the day of the festival varies from locality to locality and it is sometimes possible for married daughters to attend on the day of the festival itself.
  29. In Lalitpur the two essential festivals are Mohanī and the (Matsyendra) Jātrā. To these may be added Swanti and Disī Pūjā.
  30. For their worship of young girls see M. R. Allen (1975). On 'the gift of a virgin' being ritualized into a girl's pre-puberty rite, see M. R. Allen (1982) and Vergati (1982). I have discussed this question at length in Gellner (1991).
  31. Goodfriend (1973: 147–8) translates a similar, very brief rule-book from a Muslim caste in Delhi, from 1972. Similar *niyamāvalī* were produced by caste reform movements in north India as early as the 1930s (N. Gooptu, personal communication).
  32. Cf. Locke (1980: 65–6). In the case of monasteries owning land registered with the Guthi Samsthān, such as Jana Bāhāḥ, Kathmandu, the monastery is registered as a *guthi* (ibid. 172).
  33. On the different types of Newar Buddhist monastery see Gellner (1987) and Locke (1985). For speculation on the possible historical influence of Buddhist monastic organization on *guthis*, see Gellner (1992: 248–50).
  34. On the contacts of Newar Buddhists with Tibetan Buddhism, see T. T. Lewis (1989c) and Lewis and Jamsal (1988). On Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal, see the references in Ch. 5 n. 43.
  35. For figures on Śākya and Vajrācārya employment, including figures for the numbers employed as priests, see Gellner (1992: 263–4); for figures on the taking of Tantric initiation (ibid. 269–72); for a longer discussion of the decline of traditional Newar Buddhism (ibid. 332–6).
  36. This is described in detail in Gellner (1986).
  37. Some Untouchables have tried to organize, but in the absence of any governmental

support they have been ineffective (Gaborieau 1978: 275). The Tulādhars of Asan, possibly imitating the Marwaris, have set up a modern committee representing all those who share the same lineage deity which awards prizes to young Tulādhars of various ages who achieve top exam results (see p. 56 above).



# The Citrakārs: Caste of Painters and Mask-Makers

*Gérard Toffin*

## 1. Introduction

The Citrakārs<sup>1</sup> are a group of about 1,200 people, i.e. 0.3 per cent of the Newar population, and are clustered in the urban centres of the 'Valley'.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 80 per cent of them live in Kathmandu (about 100 households) and Lalitpur (eighty households). Traditionally, they are painters and the name of the caste comes from the Sanskrit word *citra* which means 'image, painting'.<sup>3</sup> In Newari they are referred to as Pũ, a word whose etymology is not known.<sup>4</sup> Although the question is controversial among them, the position of the Citrakārs in the caste hierarchy is quite low, considerably lower, for example, than the Maharjan Farmer caste. Broadly speaking, they have the same status as the Mālākār (Gathu, traditionally gardeners), the Mānandhar (Sāymi, Oil-Pressers), and the Rañjitrkār (Chipā, printers and dyers).

The Citrakārs consider themselves Buddhists (*buddhamārgī*). They worship both Buddhist and Hindu deities and call Vajrācārya priests to celebrate their religious ceremonies. These priests are paid both with money (*dakṣiṇā*) and food. It is considered particularly meritorious for a wealthy member of the caste to erect a *caitya* (*cibhāḥ*, small *stūpa*) in his ward and to dedicate land which will provide regular offerings to it.

## 2. The Role of Painters and Painting in Newar Society

The traditional work of the Citrakārs covers many different activities. They both print and paint holy images for certain festivals and domestic rituals (on paper, clay pots, bamboo trays, wooden structures, and cloth); they construct and paint masks which are worn during sacred dances; they draw and paint pictures of divinities around door-frames when marriages and old-age ceremonies (*burū jākma*) are celebrated; they also gild statues with gold powder. The Citrakārs have played an important role in the development of Newar art.

TABLE 8.1. *Some paintings made by Citrakārs during festivals and other religious ceremonies at fixed points in the calendar***Baiśākh (April–May)**

1. Painting of the face of Bhairava on a bamboo mat hung on the façade of the Bhairava temple in Taumādhi ʔol, Bhaktapur, during Bisket Jātrā.
2. Painting of the eyes of Bhairava on the wheels of Rāto Matsyendranāth cart in Phulcok (Lalitpur) before the *rath jātrā*. The painting of the statue of Rāto Matsyendranāth is undertaken by a special Śreṣṭha sub-group, the Nyekhu.

**Śrāvaṇ (July–August)**

1. Painting of the face of Ghaṇṭakārṇa *daitya* (demon) on baskets during Gathāmugaḥ festival, kṛṣṇa 14.
2. Various *aṣṭamātrkā pūjā* are made during Gathāmugaḥ festival, especially in connection with purification of the house (*chê bau biyegu*). On these occasions, Citrakārs paint small images of the eight Mātrkā goddesses.
3. Various paintings on paper of *nāgas* (serpents) during Nāg Pañcamī, śukla 5 (to be fixed above the main door-frame and inside the house).
4. (Occasional) repainting of Dīpaṅkara masks for Pañcadān in Lalitpur, śukla 8. (In Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Panauti, this festival occurs during Bhādra, kṛṣṇa 13.)

**Bhādra (August–September)**

1. Paintings of cow faces (*sā khwāḥ*) and Gaṇeśa figures during Sā Pāru (Gāi Jātrā), Kṛṣṇa 1 (these images are worn by males only, mostly children).
2. Paintings of Gaṇeśa figures for Cathāḥ (Gaṇeśa festival), śukla 4.
3. Paintings of the eyes and face of Bhairava on the wheels and pole of the cart of Kumārī, Gaṇeśa, and Bhairava during Indra Jātrā in Kathmandu.

**Āśvin (September–October)**

1. Painting of Vasundharā images, the Buddhist goddess of wealth, in Basandol, kṛṣṇa 3.
2. During Dasāi (Mohanī), painting of holy images of Durgā, Bhagvatī, Bhairava, Gaṇeśa (to be fixed inside the *nahā swanegu thāy*).
3. Painting the face of a demon, Maḥiśāsura, on a kind of pumpkin (*bhuyuphasi*), to be cut into two pieces by the householder or the head of the *pāyāḥ guthi*, śukla 10.
4. (Occasional) painting of god masks for Navadurgā, Aṣṭamātrkā, and various Devī dances all around the Kathmandu Valley.

**Kārtik (October–November)**

1. Printing and painting of images of Lakṣmī during Tihār (Nw. Swanti).
2. Painting of Bhīmsen (Bhindyah) images, to be fixed in shops and workshops, also during Tihār.

**Mārga (November–December)**

1. Painting of 64 *kalaś* in Cāngu Nārāyaṇ temple (Thilā Punhī)

**Pauṣ (December–January)**

1. Repainting the Seto Matsyendranāth image in Kathmandu before the ‘great bath’ (*mahāsnāna*) of the god, śukla 8.

**Māgh (January–February)**

1. Painting of Sarasvatī images for Śrī Pañcamī, śukla 5, to be fixed in the house.

**Caitra (March–April)**

1. Painting of the eyes of Bhairava on the wheels of Seto Matsyendranāth cart before Janabāhādyah *jātrā*, śukla *pakṣa*.

*Note:* Citrakārs also paint holy images for life-cycle rituals and exorcisms.

Their paintings on scrolls (*paubāhāḥ*; Skt. *paṭa*), which date from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, attain a level of artistic excellence which equals, and even surpasses, that of the Tibetan *thang-kas*. They are also responsible for most of the frescoes in the principal temples which are dedicated to the god-



PLATE 17. A Citrakār repainting the chariot of the Royal Kumārī or 'Living Goddess' just before the festival of Indra Jātrā (Yēnyāh) in Kathmandu. (G. Toffin)

desses of the Kathmandu Valley, particularly Taleju, the tutelary deity of the former Malla kings.<sup>5</sup>

This art is quintessentially religious. Take the masks for example: they represent the entire spectrum of divinities, whether these belong to the Hindu pantheon (Bhairava, Gaṇeśa, Mātṛkā, etc.) or to the Buddhist pantheon (Tārā, Hevajra, Mañjuśrī, various *bodhisattvas*, etc.), or whether they belong to both at the same time (Yoginī, Lokapāla, Vetāla, etc.). On painted scrolls, the motifs which figure the most frequently are the magical diagrams known as *maṇḍalas*, and gods in their fierce and dancing forms. Used as aids to religious meditation, the *paubāhās* are publicly displayed on certain dates during the festival calendar, especially during the Newar month of Gūlā (August). As for the frescoes, the best known depict the struggles of gods versus demons.

These figures conform to the prescriptions laid down in local model books. Most Citrakār have their own copies of these sketch guides at home and follow their directions to the letter. All of the details are fixed: the dimensions, the colours, the gestures, and the attributes. Breaking the traditional iconographic rules can turn a deity from a beneficent into a malevolent force. In passing, it should be mentioned that on all these holy paintings, the Citrakār have to 'open the eyes' (*dṛṣṭi kankegu*) of the deities, a religious act which is regarded as indispensable.

Because they are in regular contact with statues and images of important Tantric deities which are kept hidden in private shrines, the Citrakārs receive a traditional 'initiation', composed of a number of mantras, from their Vajrācārya priests. Citrakār women can also receive this special 'initiation'. The ceremony, which is usually collective, is not called *dekhā* (*dīkṣā*) like that of the high Newar castes, both Buddhist and Hindu, but *nhikā*, a term which also (and more appropriately) designates the rites which the 'initiate' must perform every morning in honour of his *āgā dyah*. This divinity, which is kept behind curtains in an isolated room in the house, must not be seen by a 'non-initiate' nor by any outside person (even a Vajrācārya, the Citrakārs emphasize). The Citrakār who performs a daily *nhikā* rite must abstain from eating chicken and avoid restaurants where there is a risk of being served food which has been polluted or which has been prepared by someone of a lower caste.

One can see, then, that the Citrakārs play an important role in both the public and private religious life of the Kathmandu Valley. They also participate actively in certain festival rituals. For example, a Citrakār (from Haugah) represents the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu during the *kārtik pyākhā* dance which takes place every autumn in front of the old royal palace in Lalitpur. In the course of this dance, Hiraṇyakaśipu is killed by Narasiṃha, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, and resuscitated a few moments later by a Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇ with the help of mantras and pure water which has been drawn from Māgaḥ Hiti on the north side of the palace.<sup>6</sup> Another function of the Citrakārs derives from indigenous ideas about medicine. Should large pimples erupt on someone's back or belly, a Citrakār is called to paint two lions on the skin of the afflicted person on either side of the navel. This type of complaint, called *jwanā kai*, is reputed to be caused by a *nāga* (serpent) from Itum Bāhāḥ in Kathmandu. It is said that only lions which have been drawn by a Citrakār will allow the patient to be saved.

In the past, Newar painters used vegetable and mineral colours. Certain vegetable products (beans) and a great number of different soils came from the Valley itself. Indigo and carmine were imported from India, lapis lazuli from Tibet. As an agglutivative, they used Indian gum or the white of an egg. Today, natural pigments have been abandoned and replaced by chemical products, manufactured in India, and sold in the bazaar in powder sachets. As an adhesive, paste made from buffalo skin has replaced egg-white and gum. The brushes, previously made from the hair of goats or female buffaloes, are now, like the colours, purchased in the market. In general, today's techniques are less subtle than those of the past and one no longer finds, in present-day scroll paintings, the particular brilliance which the natural colours lent to earlier works.

Unlike the Tibetans, the Citrakārs did not have recourse to printing plates or pumice to prepare their canvases. Instead, they have for a long time used blocks to print their holy images. The plates, called *thāsā* or *palā*, are made of wood

(*Magnolia* or *Boehmeria rugulosa*) and are made by engravers who are Tulādhar *et al.* (Urāy) or Śākya by caste. The ink, which is made of soot or bought directly in the market, is mixed with glue. The paper comes from Kathmandu and is sold in reams of a hundred sheets ( $47 \times 70$  cm.). Squatting on the floor, the painter prints horizontally on a wooden support.

In the old days, the printer worked alone or with the help of one of his children on the second floor of the house. The images were sometimes sold individually, sometimes exchanged for grain. However, while most service castes have hereditary relations with their patrons, this was never the case between painter and client: the customer could change his supplier as it suited him. The more important works—masks, frescoes, scroll paintings—were generally commissioned by religious associations and paid for in kind (grain, sugar, clarified butter, salt, etc.). Some Citrakārs, as will be seen later, still continue to have contracts with *guthi* associations for the upkeep of frescoes and the manufacture of masks.

It is difficult to know exactly how the members of this caste lived at the beginning of the twentieth century. One can, however, say that the sale of religious paintings did not constitute their sole source of income. In addition to the produce of *guthi* lands, to which they were entitled in exchange for decorative work in temples, some Citrakārs also owned fields which they had cultivated by tenants, mostly Maharjans (Jyāpu). The Citrakārs of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur also have a long tradition of distilling and selling alcohol, a tradition which they maintain up to the present day.

For the last fifteen years or so, the development of tourism has led some Citrakārs to place their workshops on the ground floor of the house and to specialize in the manufacture of souvenirs: masks, ashtrays, decorative mirrors, paintings, and so on. This work tends to be mass produced, the entire family co-operating together, with the result that the quality of the painting has rapidly become more and more crude.

Nevertheless, these curio shops have been established by only a small minority. In spite of the soaring growth of tourism, the craftsmanship of the Citrakārs has been in severe jeopardy since the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1974 only 20 per cent of the Citrakārs still devoted themselves to their traditional profession, either as a principal or secondary occupation. Among these, some have reorientated their artistic skills by turning to more commercial ventures (posters, signboards for businesses, advertising hoardings). Others have turned to painting buildings and have specialized in white-washing houses. Yet others produce figurative paintings, inspired by folklore, for the rooms of the Valley's big hotels. Finally, some Citrakārs have become photographers and put their traditional knowledge to good use by retouching photographs. As for the 80 per cent of Citrakārs who have completely abandoned painting, they include among their number many civil servants, merchants, and drivers of taxis and heavy goods vehicles.

### 3. Kinship and Marriage

The Citrakārs are divided into small patrilineal groups four to six generations deep called *kawaḥ*. These lineages, which are not named, are rather weakly structured. They fall apart as soon as the memory of a common agnatic ancestor has faded, usually after five generations or so. The *kawaḥ* rarely own material goods in common and they have little influence in the collective life of the community.<sup>7</sup> These patrilineal groups are pre-eminently defined in religious terms and are manifested most clearly at the time of funerals. On the demise of close agnates (*phuki*), who are in principle members of the same lineage, a mourning period of thirteen days is observed. During this time, *phuki* are held to be in a state of pollution. For the death of more distant agnates (*tāpā phuki*) or married daughters (*mhyāy macā*), by contrast, the mourning period is only four days. Among the Citrakārs, these latter two categories of kin purify themselves at the end of the mourning period by simply rubbing the face with mustard cake (*khaunā silegu*). For close kin, purification rituals are much more complex.

One of the defining attributes of the Newar lineage, and Citrakār lineages are no exception, is the cult of *digu dyaḥ*. Each *kawaḥ* collectively worships this divinity once a year, in the month of Baiśākh (April–May), on open sites located at the edge of the towns. In certain families the birthdays of the oldest members (*thakāli*) are also marked by offerings to this deity. However, the cult of *digu dyaḥ* has declined considerably because of recent economic and social changes. Today, normally only a small group of people will turn up to make the offerings (which are usually vegetarian). I even know of Citrakār families who have given up going to their traditional shrine and who, when the appointed day comes, worship their *digu dyaḥ* on the terrace of the house while facing towards the site they used to frequent.

In Lalitpur, lineages are known by the names of the different quarters (*twāḥ*) where Citrakārs live. In the past it would seem likely that there was a correspondence between kinship groups and residential areas. This is how elderly informants speak when naming six *kawaḥ* for the whole town: 1. Nugah; 2. Haugah; 3. Saugah; 4. Phōtakā; 5. Tsucikā; 6. Cārku (or Cālakhu). However, as in Kathmandu, migrations from one town to another have considerably weakened the territorial base of kinship groups. Some lineages have become extinct; others have split up into several branches. Today no one has a clear idea of the current Citrakār kinship groups in Lalitpur or of the areas of the town they correspond to.

As with all Newars, affinal relations play an important role for Citrakārs. In particular, the mother's brother (*pāju*) keeps a watchful eye on the education of his sister's son and makes gifts of clothes to him on the occasion of his initiation ritual (*kaytā pūjā*). It should be noted that the term *pāju* is used in an extended classificatory sense: every male belonging to the mother's lineage, even a child,

can fill this role. In certain cases, two or three 'maternal uncles' take part in the *kaytā pūjā* of their nephew and play an active ritual role. In general, a child enjoys freer relations with his maternal uncle than with his father.

Another important relationship established by marriage is with husbands of sisters and daughters (*jilājā* or *jicā bhāju*). These relatives are invited to all domestic and calendrical feasts (*nakhatyā*). Sons-in-law must show respect, and a certain reserve, towards their parents-in-law. They should never go to the house of their wife's parents without a formal invitation (traditionally delivered by a Maharjan messenger). Unlike the Swāgumi of Pyangaon (Toffin 1984: 165), the Citrakār *jilājā* does not have any special function during funerals. In the kinship terminology (in Kathmandu and Lalitpur), one might note the terms *maleju* to designate the wife of the maternal uncle and *jicā pāju* (or *pāju*) to designate the husband of the paternal aunt.

Depending on the informant, marriage restrictions apply to between five and seven generations on both the father's and mother's side. This means that no marriage may take place either within the range of agnatic relatives known as *phuki* or inside the lineage (*kawaḥ*). Traditionally, marriages were arranged by parents. A father who wanted to arrange a marriage for his son employed an intermediary (*lami*) to sound out possible partners and make the initial approaches to them. With very few exceptions, marriages only took place with other Citrakārs. However, unions often took place between Citrakārs from different towns, particularly between Lalitpur and Kathmandu. Age at marriage was generally very low because, like the Maharjans and Mānandhars, the Citrakārs used to practise child marriage. I have come across several cases of marital unions between children aged less than 10 years. In such cases, the young bride would only come to her husband's house for festivals: she would not actually go to live with him until she was 16 or 17 years old, and sometimes not even until after the birth of her first child. It is also worth pointing out that parents frequently organized several marriages at the same time in order to economize on the costs of the marriage ceremonies. This practice was common among many low-status Newar castes.

Inter-caste marriages have become considerably more common since 1960–70, particularly in Kathmandu, where roughly half of Citrakār weddings involve a spouse of another caste. These alliances are considered as 'love marriages' and do not involve elaborate ceremonies. Nevertheless, the central act of the traditional Newar marriage, known as *hwākegu*, during which the spouses-to-be exchange a number of small gifts, is celebrated in the bridegroom's house. Most mixed marriages take place with other Newar castes (Rañjitrkār, Mānandhar, Pradhān, Tulādhār *et al.* [Urāy], Śākya, etc.) but there are also some with Parbatīyā castes (Bāhun, Chetri). Such unions do not give rise to expulsion from the caste, except in the case of a marriage with someone belonging to an impure caste. However, the caste status of children of mixed marriages is rather confused. On the advice of his father, one of my Kathmandu



informants, who was born of a mixed Citrakār–Tulādhār marriage, changed his name to Citradhār, splicing the names of both parents!

Divorce (*pār* or *pācuke*) seems always to have been frequent. Those who were married as children were particularly prone to separate in adulthood. Remarriage of widows is not encouraged, but nor is it strictly forbidden. Should a 'husband' die prematurely while still a child, his young spouse could reclaim her freedom by sending a small sack of betel nuts (*gwe lita chwayegu*) to her parents-in-law. When a woman died, it was possible, but not obligatory, to marry her younger sister. It was, however, forbidden to marry the deceased's elder sister (*sasaḥ tatā*). The custom of levirate is forbidden among Newars, who consider it to be a form of incest.

Cases of matrilocal residence are very rare. The son-in-law who lives with his wife's parents is given the Nepali term *ghar jumāi* by the Citrakārs. When a son-in-law continues to live at his wife's house after the death of her parents, he is called *dmālāji*, a very pejorative term in the eyes of all Newars.

#### 4. The Sī Guthi or the Guthi of the Dead

The role of the *guthi* associations is as important, if not more so, than that of the small patrilineal *kawāḥ*. In my opinion the former constitute the most original aspect of the social organization of the Newar Painter caste. In Bhaktapur, where the old forms of the *guthis* appear to have been better preserved than elsewhere, the Citrakārs generally belong to two *guthis* simultaneously: the *sī guthi*, 'the *guthi* of the dead' (or 'the death *guthi*'),<sup>8</sup> and the *deślā guthi* (elsewhere *deśanāḥ guthi*) 'the *guthi* of the locality'. Of the two, the death *guthi* is, without doubt, the more important nowadays. This organization is essential for the proper integration of the community. To be excluded from one's *sī guthi* is to be excluded from one's lineage and one's caste.

For the twenty-one Citrakār households in Bhaktapur,<sup>9</sup> there are two *sī guthis*: the *taḥdhā guthi*, which in spite of its name ('big *guthi*') is the smaller of the two, and the *bhailaḥ guthi* (or *bhairav guthi*). The former comprises eight households, seven in Tacapāl and one in Dugu Malla, these two quarters (*tmāḥ*; Np. *ṭol*) being situated in the higher (*cway*) part of the town. The second *guthi* is made up of thirteen Bhaktapur Citrakār households (in Taumādhi, Nāsumanā, Tacapāl, and Gaḥchē) and one in Sankhu, a small town situated in the north-east of the Kathmandu Valley. It is said that originally there were five Citrakār *sī guthis* in Bhaktapur; at the beginning of the century there were still three. The last survivors of this third *guthi*, called *lākulāchē guthi*,<sup>10</sup> apparently preferred to join up with the other two *guthis* rather than have to bear the heavy costs of an organization reduced to a small number of members.

The principal function of the *sī guthi* is to organize the funerals of its members. It has to oversee the transfer of the corpse to the funeral pyre as well



as take care of the cremation itself. It is also charged with dispersing the final remains of the body to the four corners of the Kathmandu Valley. The duties of the *guthiyārs* are very precise: when a death occurs in one of the households of the *guthi*, the close relatives of the deceased immediately hasten to announce the death to all the *guthiyārs*. The news must be conveyed as quickly as possible because no part of the funeral proceedings may be undertaken before all the *guthi* members (one or two per household) have gathered in the house of the deceased. When *guthiyārs* cannot justify their absence, they are required to pay fines.

The *guthiyārs* have to bring with them several objects which are indispensable for the proper running of the ceremony. First of all, there is the yellow shroud (*dewā*) which covers the corpse. This shroud is kept either in the house of the *thakāli* (the most senior member of the *guthi*), or in the house of the *guthiyār* who is responsible for *guthi* affairs for that year. There is only one shroud for all the members of the *guthi*; a few minutes before lighting the funeral pyre, it is taken off the corpse and put away until another death occurs in the group. The *guthiyārs* also have to bring nine sheaves of wheat straw (*chmāli*) which are used to burn the body. Among the other objects brought at this time, the following should be mentioned: a mat (*pulu*)<sup>11</sup> which is used to wrap around the corpse, stalks of bamboo (*ti*) which are put in the mouth of the dead body and are used to light the pyre, a terracotta pot (*bhājā*), some rice husks (*mwa*), and different types of incense (*dhupāy*) which are bought from Newar Ayurvedic doctors (*vaidya*). Having arrived at the house of the deceased, the *guthiyārs* begin by constructing the bamboo bier called *kūtāḥ* in Newari<sup>12</sup> on which the corpse will be transported. At the head and foot of the *kūtāḥ* they fix small flags coloured red and white at regular intervals; then, before the procession leaves, the *guthiyārs* cook some rice just in front of the house of the deceased in a terracotta pot placed on top of three bricks. This rice, called *kaḥṭi jā*, will be offered to the soul of the dead person before the cremation.

The funeral procession, which goes from the town to the cremation site (*dīpa*),<sup>13</sup> follows a very strictly pre-ordained pattern; every *guthiyār* has a particular place in it which is fixed by tradition. At the head of the procession come nine members of the *guthi* each of whom holds a sheaf of wheat straw, some bamboo, and material for offerings. Behind them, another *guthiyār* carries a terracotta pot containing smouldering rice husks. He is followed by a married daughter of the family of the deceased (*mhyāy macā*) who has to throw rice and paddy along the route of the procession.<sup>14</sup> Then, some distance behind them, comes the stretcher carried on the shoulders of four *guthiyārs*, the *thakāli* ('seniors') at the front and the *kwakāli* ('juniors') behind. At the end of the procession come the close relatives of the dead person, followed by the other members of the *guthi*. Once at the cremation site, the *guthiyārs* sprinkle the corpse with water (*laḥ twankegu*; lit. 'to give water to drink'),<sup>15</sup> construct the

funeral pyre, and place the body on top. The wood is provided by the *guthi*. The organization has a small store at its disposal where the wood needed for cremations is kept.

Once the pyre has been lit by the son of the deceased (*mitaimha*; lit. 'the person who puts the fire'), the close relatives go to purify themselves in the river close by; after this, they return to their respective homes. Only the *guthiyārs* stay by the pyre to the very end to ensure that the corpse is fully burned. A messenger is sent to the relatives of the deceased to announce that the cremation is finished; this news lifts the fast which is observed by all the *phuki*, that is, the patrilineal relatives of the deceased. Immediately after this, or the following day, these same *phuki* return to the cremation ground and make an effigy of the deceased with ashes.<sup>16</sup> The *guthiyārs* are again obliged to be present at this time in order to collect the remains of the corpse, to throw some of them in the river and to carry the rest to various well-known pilgrimage sites in the Kathmandu Valley.<sup>17</sup> Finally, in the days following the cremation, both the men and women of the *guthi* come to present their condolences to the family of the deceased. This ceremony is called *thika wanigu* in Bhaktapur and *bicāh wanegu* in Kathmandu.

Funerals are not the only occasions when the *sī guthi* manifests its unity and solidarity. Every year, on a fixed date, the members of the organization gather together in full strength for a feast (*bhway*) which takes place in the house of the *guthiyār* who is in charge of the *guthi* for that year. I will describe the way in which this ceremony unfolds among the Citrakārs of Bhaktapur.

About twenty years ago, the members of the *taḥdhā guthi* used to gather together three times a year: on the occasion of Śrī Pañcamī (the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Māgh: January–February), for Pā Cāhrhay (or Ghodā Jātrā, the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Caitra: March–April), and for Akṣaya Tṛtīyā (during Baiśākh: April–May). Nowadays the *guthi* only meets once a year, for Śrī Pañcamī. The festival lasts four days and at least two members of each household must take part. On the first day, the family which is in charge of the *guthi* obtains the necessary provisions and prepares the dishes for the feast. The second day is the most important since it is the day of the feast itself. Before the meal, all the members of the organization, as well as a Buddhist Vajrācārya priest called specially for the occasion, worship the statue of the tutelary deity of the *guthi*: the Buddhist Tantric deity, Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa. During the preceding year this deity is kept behind a curtain, on the top floor of the house, away from prying eyes and the impure.<sup>18</sup> On the day of Śrī Pañcamī, it is exhibited to all of the *guthiyārs*, who worship it with incense, water, and vermillion.

The feast takes place in an atmosphere, marked by gravity and reserve, which seems almost religious. All the members of the *sī guthi* are there, including wives and children. To emphasize the social importance of the gathering, plates and bowls are set down for those who are absent, their position depend-

ing on where the absent member comes in the association's hierarchy. Those who are serving the food take care to make sure that some of each dish is placed on each of these plates. The organization of the feast falls totally on the *guthiyār* who is in charge for that year. The expenses are later shared among all the members of the organization. During the meal, the guests discuss the quality of the food and alcohol which they are being served. It is a great insult for the host to see one of his dishes being refused by a guest.

On the third day of the ceremony, the task of taking charge of the *guthi* is transferred to another *guthiyār* (*pāḥ biyegu*, lit. 'to give the turn to') according to the system of rotation worked out by the group. Finally, on the fourth day, the accounts of the organization are gone over, subscriptions are collected, and the cult objects and the statue of the tutelary deity are transferred to the house of the *guthiyār* who will be in charge of organizing the same feast the following year. If there has been a birth during the preceding year within the *guthi*, an offering is also made on this day to the divinity Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa. This offering is called *kisalī*: it is made up of rice, nuts, and a one-*paisā* coin.

The members of the second *sī guthi* of the Citrakārs of Bhaktapur, the *bhailaḥ guthi*, also gather together once a year for a feast. The feast takes place between the second and fourth days of the bright fortnight of the month of Baiśākh (April–May). The proceedings of the ceremony are in every respect identical to those just described. The only difference is in the name of the tutelary deity of the *guthi*, which in this case is called Mahābhairava. A bronze statue of this divinity is worshipped in the presence of a Vajrācārya priest. The *nāyaḥs*, that is, the *guthi* elders, sacrifice a goat in front of the Bhairava temple in Taumādhiṭol. While the tutelary deity of the *taḥdhā guthi* does not accept animal sacrifices, that of the *bhailaḥ guthi* is carnivorous and is offered blood and alcohol.<sup>19</sup>

How does recruitment into the 'guthi of the dead' take place? As a general rule, membership of the organization is hereditary: children belong to the *guthi* of their father. When a daughter marries, she leaves the *sī guthi* of her parents and joins that of her parents-in-law by paying an entrance fee which is fixed by tradition. But this hereditary transmission does not always take place automatically. Thus young people who set up independent households after marriage are required to confirm their membership of the *guthi* by making over to it a sum of 20 rupees. It often happens that parents and children quarrel with each other; the children can take advantage of a change of residence to escape from the influence of their family and seek admission into another *guthi*. This is very frequent in Lalitpur and Kathmandu; since there are many *guthis* in these two conurbations, it is easy to choose a new organization. In Bhaktapur, changing one's *guthi* is a more delicate affair; the organization to which a request for admission has been made will consult the other *sī guthi* in the town before coming to a decision. If it seems that the admission will not cause ruptures within the *guthi*, the candidate will be accepted; if, on the contrary, the ad-

mission risks bringing dissensions in its wake, it will not agree to the request. The decision is not, therefore, free and autonomous. Admission into a *sī guthi* does not really become anonymous and voluntary until the number of associations in a locality becomes sufficiently high.

When a Citrakār family changes residence and goes to live in a neighbouring town, it almost always leaves its *guthi* of origin and affiliates itself to a local organization. The amount of the entrance fee required depends very much on the *sī guthi* in question. In some cases, the fee is nominal (a ritual offering of *kisalī*); in other cases, it can reach 200 rupees. Changing organization when one changes residence is a solution to a major anxiety: when funerals occur, the cremation should take place as quickly as possible. One must therefore be able to count on the *guthiyārs* who, we have seen, are indispensable to the proceedings and who should come with the minimum possible delay. Rather than count on a kinship group scattered all over the Valley, the Newars prefer to have a local organization all of whose members can be contacted easily and quickly when the need arises.

Dissensions within families and migrations inside the Kathmandu Valley have led, as the generations have gone by, to a very great mixing up of the population. In Bhaktapur, an estimated 20 per cent of the *guthiyārs* have recently moved into the town; less than a generation ago, they were still living in neighbouring settlements such as Banepa, Sankhu, or Dhulikhel. In Kathmandu, which has been for the last twenty years or so a centre of attraction for Citrakārs in search of new employment opportunities, this mixing up of the death *guthis* has reached new levels. Now it is not uncommon for these organizations to be composed of as many new arrivals as original inhabitants of the capital.

Today, then, the Citrakār *sī guthi* is neither a lineage nor a clan.<sup>20</sup> The members are not all *phuki*, which is to say that they are not all attached by links of patrilineal kinship. Marriage alliances within the group are not prohibited as long as they fall outside a sufficient number of generations: as we saw above, between five and seven is the rule normally given, though it is often transgressed. Neither can the 'guthi of the dead' be reduced to a residential group. A good illustration of this comes from the following story of a Citrakār family, originally from Sankhu, which was told to me in Bhaktapur:

About twenty-five years ago, a Citrakār from Sankhu came to Bhaktapur, where he had to appear in court about a land tenure matter. Some days after his arrival in Bhaktapur, this Citrakār fell seriously ill and died soon afterwards, probably from an attack of cholera. The authorities in the town called the local Citrakārs to take charge of the body. The latter agreed to this and sent a messenger to Sankhu to announce the death to his family. The son of the deceased came as soon as possible to Bhaktapur and, with the help of the *bhailaḥ guthi* Citrakārs, burned the body according to the customary religious rites.<sup>21</sup> Then this family, finding itself to be the last Citrakār household in Sankhu, asked the *bhailaḥ guthi* if they could join their association. Their request was

granted and, since then, we, the Citrakārs of the *bhailaḥ guthi*, have to go to Sankhu when a death occurs in this family. On the other hand, every time that a death takes place in our *guthi*, a Citrakār from Sankhu is under obligation to come to Bhaktapur.

Exceptional conditions can, then, break the territorial unity of the *guthi* and the group may have members in several different localities. There is one other fundamental point here: the members of a 'death *guthi*' must belong to the same caste. This rule is absolute and unbreakable. It is for this reason that, in spite of the distance which separates the two towns of Bhaktapur and Sankhu, the Citrakārs of Sankhu have had to affiliate to the *bhailaḥ guthi* of Bhaktapur when it would have been more convenient for them to join a local *guthi* made up of Śreṣṭhas or Maharjans.

There exist other organizations alongside the *sī guthi* which play an important role when a death occurs. For example, among the Citrakārs of Lalitpur, two different *guthis* share the duties which are connected with funerals: the *sī guthi* and the *sanāḥ guthi*.<sup>22</sup> In this city a Citrakār may in principle belong to both of these associations simultaneously. For the *guthiyārs*, the essential difference between the two groups lies in the fact that the members of the *sanāḥ guthi* leave the cremation site as soon as the pyre is lit while the members of the *sī guthi* have to remain there to ensure that the body is fully burnt. Nowadays the members of the *sanāḥ guthi* do not play any other active role during the ceremony although they may assist the members of the *sī guthi* to carry the bier. Their functions are very symbolic: above all, their presence marks their sympathy for the family of the deceased. The *sanāḥ guthi* may well also provide some financial support to the close relatives of the deceased. This organization possesses, like the *sī guthi*, an internal hierarchy and administrative structure which are quite well developed. However, it does not own any landed or other immovable goods; any expenses it incurs are met by the annual contributions of the members (in 1974, 15–20 rupees).

The Citrakārs say that the *sī guthi* is more important than the *sanāḥ guthi*. Today, only those who are well-off belong to this latter organization while affiliation to a *sī guthi* is mandatory for all, even for the least well-off. What purpose, then, does the *sanāḥ guthi* serve? In principle it is a charitable institution which assumes the responsibility of assisting the family of the deceased, both psychologically and financially, at the time of a death. By being present at the annual gatherings and the feasts of the *guthi*, by worshipping the tutelary divinity, and by contributing subscriptions and making donations, the *guthiyār* displays his piety; he accumulates merit which will perhaps help him to be reborn in a future life in a superior form. Moreover, by these acts of charity and piety, not only are the evils of the future alleviated, but one also acquires prestige in one's present life in the eyes of the community. One joins a *sanāḥ guthi* to present a 'respectable image' and to improve one's social standing, for

which there are, of course, obvious parallels with certain societies or clubs in the Western world.

### 5. Deślā (or Deśanāḥ) Guthi: The 'Guthi of the Locality'

The second type of *guthi* which exists among the Citrakārs of Bhaktapur is called the *deślā guthi*. The word *deś* means 'country, town, village'.<sup>23</sup> This *guthi* unites all the Citrakārs of the town. The organization is led by five *nāyaḥs* (or *thakālis*), the five oldest painters of Bhaktapur. It meets every year on the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight of Māgh (January–February).<sup>24</sup> Early in the morning of this day, the five *nāyaḥs* sacrifice a goat in front of the temple of Hinara Ganedyah, also known as Sūrya Bināyak, which is situated to the south of Bhaktapur. In the past, all the Citrakārs of the town gathered here and feasted in front of the temple. At present only the elders of the *guthi* take part in the ceremony; then, having eaten a light snack (*samay*) of beaten rice and soya beans, they make their way back to the town. The *guthi* feast is rotated among the twenty-one households of the Bhaktapur Citrakārs.

The *deślā guthi* has some financial assets but for the most part it is maintained by members' subscriptions of between 25 and 30 rupees a year. One person, chosen by the five *nāyaḥs* of the *guthi*, presides over the association for a period which, in principle, should not exceed seven years. This person is given the title of *khyahpi nāyah*. He is chosen on the basis of his professional qualities without regard to his seniority. It is the quality of the artist which is rewarded: the *khyahpi nāyah* is considered as the best painter in the town. The position affords him considerable advantages: he has a virtual monopoly on all the contracts made with the Guthi Samsthān, the government agency which regulates those *guthis* under state control.

In Bhaktapur, the *khyahpi nāyah* has the task of painting the eyes of Bhairava on the wheels of the chariot used during Bisket Jātrā,<sup>25</sup> as well as painting the face of the same deity on a bamboo mat called *bhakhāri* which is hung on the façade of the Bhairava temple in Taumādhi ʔol. He also has to construct and paint the masks which are worn for the dance of the Nava Durgā during Mohanī (Np. Dasaī), and those of the five Buddhas (Pañca Buddha) which are carried through the streets of the town during Pañcadān,<sup>26</sup> on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Bhādra (August–September). Finally, he used to have the responsibility for the upkeep of the wonderful frescoes of Taleju Bhavanī, and for Nyātāpol (the five-roofed temple), the Bhairava temple, and so on. These responsibilities represent important contracts: for the annual construction of the twelve masks for Nava Durgā alone, he receives three *muri* of *saruwā jāki* (a mixture of paddy and husked rice), i.e. about 170 kilos of dry grain. For the painting of Bhairava on wicker-work for Indra Jātrā which takes place on

the full moon of the month of Bhādra (August–September), he is paid nine *pāthī* of paddy.<sup>27</sup> In 1974 it was Vishnu Bahadur Citrakār (of Tacapāl), who belonged to the *taḥdhā sī guthi*, who had the monopoly on all these contracts.

The *khyahpi nāyah* also has an important role in decision-making in the ‘*guthi* of the locality’. In the final analysis, it is he who decides to exclude someone from the organization, and thereby from the caste. As soon as the sanction has been taken, the *guthiyārs* are obliged to refrain from sharing cooked rice with the person who has been excluded. In spite of the powers and privileges which he holds, the *khyahpi nāyah* is nevertheless himself not excluded from the sanctions of his own *deślā guthi*. Vishnu Bahadur’s predecessor, Suku Bahadur, was himself excluded from the caste because he had married a *jyāpunī*, a woman of the Newar farming caste. When he died, not one Citrakār was present at his funeral nor took part in the purification ceremony (*ghaḥsū*) which takes place on the twelfth day after the cremation.

What is the role of the ‘locality *guthi*’? Traditionally the function of this *guthi* was to ensure a strict endogamy within the caste; all members who married women of lower caste were excluded. It also imposed fines on those *guthiyārs* who had sexual relations with women from impure castes. Today, with the caste system no longer having the backing of the legal system, and with inter-caste marriages no longer being punishable in the eyes of the law, these cases of exclusion are becoming rarer, or at least more discreet.

The *deślā guthi* also has the function of regulating economic competition among its members and sharing out the clientele of the locality. In Bhaktapur, as we have seen, this association nominates someone, the *khyahpi nāyah*, who has a monopoly over all the most important contracts for a certain period. Whether it is a question of establishing a system of monopoly or one of rotation, the *deślā guthi* assigns a precise role to everyone and prevents free competition. All economic relations which tie the Citrakārs to other castes, both in Newar and Parbatiyā society, are tightly controlled by this association: it is the five *nāyahs* of the *guthi* and the *khyahpi nāyah* who make sure that Vajrācārya priests are found for the domestic ceremonies of all the *guthiyārs*, and that Khadgī butchers will come for their sacrifices and purification ceremonies.

In principle, it is also they who are charged with defending the interests of the group in its relations with the government and the city council (Nagar Pañcāyat). The corporatism of the ‘*guthi* of the locality’ is also reinforced by the financial facilities which this association accords in some cases to its members: *guthiyārs* thus have the right to low interest, or even interest-free, loans.<sup>28</sup> This permits artisans to make investments, improve their techniques, and, in so doing, to adapt to the requirements of modern living. The association also comes to the help of the least well-off in the group by giving them donations. A relief fund helps those families which have been hit by sickness or death. One can, then, really speak of a corporation, with all the social, economic, and political implications which that entails. The *deślā guthi* is an association with

a corporatist character which maintains the unity and solidarity of the caste at the level of the locality.

This solidarity is equally well expressed on the socio-religious front: the members of the organization have to demonstrate their unity by being present at the funerals of all *guthiyārs* and by following the funeral procession as far as the cremation site. However, while the members of the *sī guthi* have to stay at the cremation ground until the corpse is completely burnt, the members of the *deślā guthi*, like those of the *sanāḥ guthi*, return home once the *mitaimha* has set fire to the pyre. Some days after the funeral, the women of the *deślā guthi* have to present their condolences when they come to weep at the house of the deceased (*bicāḥ wanegu*, or *thika wanigu* in Bhaktapur Newari). They bring with them salt, grains of rice, ginger, and black pepper, all of which are offered to the spirit of the deceased.

Previously the Citrakārs of Lalitpur and Kathmandu also had associations similar to the *deślā guthi*. In Lalitpur, where I was able to obtain detailed information, the *guthi* of the locality, here called *deśanāḥ guthi*, was led by five *thakāli* (the five oldest Citrakār men in the town) and two *nāyah* called the *khaypi nāyah* and the *chayapi nāyah*.<sup>29</sup> The *khaypi nāyah* was the appointed intermediary between the Citrakārs of Lalitpur and the central authorities. It was he who distributed the orders of the *Guthi Samsthān* concerning religious paintings and who raised manpower in the community of certain obligatory works decreed by the state. He was a notable whose title had to be confirmed by the authorities and who prided himself on his links with the higher echelons of the administration in the kingdom. The role of the *chayapi nāyah* was to ensure that religious rules were respected inside the group. With the agreement of the five *thakālis*, he could exclude from the caste any Citrakār who was found guilty of an unacceptable marriage alliance.

Unlike Bhaktapur, these two posts of *nāyah* were transmitted hereditarily, from father to eldest son. An initiation rite called *nāyah luyegu*, relatively similar to the rite organized for the lineage heads (*thakāli luyegu*), was organized at the time of their investiture. If the presumptive heir was thought to be incapable of assuming this responsibility, the five *thakālis* got together and assigned the function to another Citrakār. The *chayapi nāyah* could also be dismissed by his peers for gross religious failings. The 'guthi of the locality' met once a year on the day of Rām Navamī, the ninth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Caitra (March–April) during Cait Dasaī.<sup>30</sup> A sacrifice was offered to the goddess Mahālakṣmī in Langankhel in the south of the town, after which a feast was eaten together. The food, of which there was plenty, would be carried by Maharjans.

As in Bhaktapur, the *deśanāḥ guthi* (from *deś*, 'locality', and most probably *sanāḥ*, 'funeral procession') of the Lalitpur Citrakārs also had functions to perform when deaths occurred. Its members had to display their sympathy in some way or other when one of their number passed away. According to many



informants, the *deśanāḥ guthi* was simply the coming together of the town's *sī guthis*. Now that the 'guthi of the locality' has disappeared, it is the *sī guthis* which regulate social matters in the local caste group. In ancient times it seems it was the *sanāḥ guthis* which played the role of 'guthi of the locality'. The connection between funerary rituals and social control over caste affairs seems to me to be fundamental. What it demonstrates is that death *guthis* are the structural pillar of Citrakār society, its ultimate foundation, as is the case for many other Newar castes.<sup>31</sup>

In Lalitpur and Kathmandu, the *deśanāḥ guthis* have almost disappeared. Population growth, numerous changes of residence, inter-caste marriages, and new economic conditions have profoundly upset the communal traditions of the Citrakārs of these two towns. Today there is no more *khaypi nāyah* or *chayapi nāyah*. The *deśanāḥ guthi* of Lalitpur is now only a memory while that of Kathmandu does not comprise more than thirty or so members. How is this disaffection to be explained? For the most part, it is due to recent changes in residence. In 1974 about a third of the Citrakārs in Kathmandu had only been living in the city for one generation. These newcomers, after leaving the *deśanāḥ guthi* of their original locality, have not attempted to affiliate to a new group. As a matter of fact, entry into a *guthi* is always delicate and costly: a not inconsiderable sum—from 200 to 300 rupees in Kathmandu—has to be paid to become a fully-fledged *guthiyār* and the association's rules oblige the newly inscribed member to take charge of the expenses of organizing the annual feast as soon as he is admitted. Secondly, the increase in inter-caste marriages has considerably weakened the degree of social control in the community: the *thakālis* and the *nāyahs* are no longer able to lay down the law as they used to.

There is also the fact, as young people see it, that the *guthis* have lost their religious significance; the annual gatherings are judged tiresome and of no interest. The new possibilities which are offered by economic modernization—photography, advertising publicity, industrial art—have progressively undermined the narrow constraints of *guthi* corporatism. Forms of mutual aid and caste councils are now seen merely as obstacles to the forces of economic development. Individualistic tendencies are beginning to appear, particularly among those Citrakārs who move into the capital from outside. Finally, in Lalitpur another factor has played a role in this process of disintegration: there have been serious internal quarrels, connected with the initiation ceremony (*nāyah luyegu*) of the two *nāyahs* of the Citrakār community, which have undermined the solidarity of the *guthiyārs* and have caused the *deśanāḥ guthi* to break up.

My portrait of the social organization of the Citrakārs would be incomplete if I did not mention the custom of the *jāt bhway*. This is a feast given by a Citrakār for all the members of his caste living in the Kathmandu Valley. Such an event normally coincides either with the performance of a life-cycle rite of one of the host's family members or with the inauguration of a *caitya* (*cibhāh*

*busādhā*). The great-grandfather of the present *khyahpi nāyah* of Bhaktapur organized a feast of this kind in the last century: 108 animals (buffaloes, goats, and ducks) were consumed. The gathering took place in the open air at Yāsikhel, in the south of Bhaktapur, at the spot where the ceremonial *yahsi* pole is erected during Bisket Jātrā. Traditionally, the remnants of food were to be conserved for four days in a closed room, then 'tasted' (*cipā thikeyu*) by the household head, and finally distributed to poor people. To patronize a *jāt bhway* was a means of garnering prestige on a large scale and could normally only be undertaken by a wealthy man or a *nāyah*.

## 6. Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from this brief analysis of the two most important Citrakār *guthis* in the Kathmandu Valley?<sup>32</sup> First of all, it must be understood that the *deślā* (or *deśanāḥ*) *guthi* is a kind of association which is widespread in Newar society; it is found with almost the same features among a number of other Newar castes. Take, for example, the *de ācārya guthi* of the Vajrācārya Buddhist priests about which Colin Rosser (1966: 116 ff.) has given us a very vivid picture. In Kathmandu, this *guthi* comprises all the Vajrācāryas of the city who have gone through the initiation ritual of *ācāḥ luyegu*, which is generally performed between the ages of 8 and 10. The association meets every year on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Caitra (March–April) behind the Svayambhū *stūpa* at the Tantric shrine called Śāntipur. It is run by eighteen *thakālis*, each of whom represents one of the main Buddhist monasteries (Nw. *mū bāhāḥ*) in Kathmandu.

The *de ācārya guthi* has strict control over the recruitment of its members and, just like the *deślā guthi* of the Citrakārs, regulates the sharing out of clients among the *guthiyārs*. A very precise body of laws prevents competition from developing among the priests and sanctions are imposed on those who do not respect the rules. If a Vajrācārya is accused of illegal competition, it is even possible to refuse his children the right to take part in the ritual of *ācāḥ luyegu*, which is the real marker of access into the Vajrācārya caste. Another resemblance with the Citrakārs is that the *de ācārya guthi* is headed by someone called the *lāy guruju*, on whom all important decisions devolve. This title is hereditary, with one family from Maru Twāḥ having a monopoly on the position.<sup>33</sup> The example of the Vajrācārya is not unique; among the Mānandhar (Oil-Pressers), the same kind of organization, with the same corporatist characteristics, could be found some years ago; in their case, perhaps even more accentuated. For many Newar castes, and particularly the artisan castes, the 'locality *guthis*' (or 'local caste *guthis*') represent an ideal method of regulating social problems which are thrown up by competition within a closed economic system.

The *deślā guthi* also brings to mind the caste councils (*pañcāyat*) which have been widely reported in India,<sup>34</sup> though there are important differences. There are, or were until recently, four Citrakār *deślā guthis* for the whole of the Kathmandu Valley, one in each of the following towns: Thimi, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, and Kathmandu. These four *deślā guthis* have few relations with each other; decisions are taken at the level of the locality and not at the level of the caste. There is no overall machinery or supreme authority for all of the Citrakārs in the Kathmandu Valley. The caste does not appear as a group which is solidary or united as a whole: in all cases, territorial affiliations take precedence. The only index of caste unity is the custom of the *jāt bhway*, 'caste feast'. But this meeting has no legal existence and no corporate character. Furthermore, no decisions are made on this occasion. As shown earlier, it serves above all as a vehicle for the host to improve his personal standing in the community and to accumulate religious merit by performing a charitable deed. One hosts a *jāt bhway* for the same reasons that one joins a *sanāḥ guthi*: for prestige.

In general, the role played by residence in Newar society is fundamental and cannot be reduced to other factors.<sup>35</sup> For example, among the Citrakārs, as among the Maharjans and the Mānandhars, kinship groups tend to be absorbed by groups based on residence and by the *guthi* ritual associations. The formation of small territorial units turned in on themselves is a hallmark of Newar society (Toffin 1984: 592). It is possible that this introversion owes something to the extreme political fragmentation which characterized the Kathmandu Valley during the medieval period, particularly from 1480 to 1768. At a time when the Newars were very developed economically, it is likely that incessant quarrels and fighting between the three Malla kingdoms of the Valley (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur), and the privileges which each king jealously sought to maintain for his own territory, played an important part in the formation of cloistered social units, at least at the level of the city.

Residence is also important, if not quite to the same degree of exclusivity, in the death or cremation *guthis* and in the other associations connected with funerals. More precisely, these associations have a hybrid character: they are not defined exclusively by either kinship or residence, but by a mixture of the two. They recall those forms of social organization which Claude Lévi-Strauss (1984: 192–9) has called 'house societies' (*sociétés à maisons*). As in many societies, both European and Asian, Newar social organization is characterized by a relatively shallow genealogical memory, a clear distinction between the close kin of the household head and other agnates (*phuki/tāpā phuki*), marriage circles among kin who are neither too close nor too distant, and a marked division between elders and juniors (cf. Lamaison 1987: 36). I would endorse Lévi-Strauss's suggestion that this kind of structure expresses a situation where political and economic interests tend to intrude upon the social field: 'In this kind of social organization one can discern the conscious intention of remaining

open to historical development' (Lévi-Strauss 1991: 436). But it would require a major comparative study fully to situate the Newar *sī guthis* from this perspective.

For a complete understanding of the *sī guthis*, one must also bear in mind beliefs concerning death and impurity, beliefs which the Newars have derived in large part from Hinduism. A death is an event of the utmost seriousness; it upsets the order of the family and of society at large. To restore this order, one should be particularly attentive to the rituals which are carried out on this occasion. For when a death occurs, the soul of the deceased does not go directly to the kingdom of Yama, the god of death. At first, it wanders around in this world. Its attachments to the living are not yet ruptured and it lingers in the house of the deceased's kin.<sup>36</sup> During this period, the soul of the deceased, called *preta*, is unhappy; it is separated from the body and can neither get up nor sit down; neither can it eat because its throat, it is said, is as narrow as the eye of a needle.<sup>37</sup> Because it is unhappy, the *preta* is dangerous to its relatives. Dissatisfied, hungry, and thirsty, it might find some way to vent its discontent. All of the post-funerary rites have the underlying function of distancing the *preta* from its natal household and leading it to the kingdom of Yama where it can join the benevolent manes. It takes just one mistake, however minute, in carrying out the ritual to cause the *preta* to be prevented from ever entering this kingdom and condemning it to torment the living.

One other belief helps to explain the speed with which the *guthiyārs* have to get together and complete the cremation. When someone dies, the soul goes to make a preliminary visit to Yama. This is to make sure that there will be no mistake when it comes to the moment of judgement by the king of the dead.<sup>38</sup> Satisfied with this inspection, the soul returns as soon as possible to the land of the living to be with its mortal remains. It is for this reason that the corpse is burned in the intervening period; this signifies to the *preta* that its place is no longer in this world, but in the kingdom of Yama. These beliefs help to explain the *sī guthi*.<sup>39</sup> Newars are obsessed by death, and they are obsessed by the dramatic consequences which can arise if the funeral rites are not carried out according to tradition.<sup>40</sup> All Newars that I have met, whether they are peasants, merchants, priests, or painters, display the same mixture of incomprehension and fear with respect to those people who live on the edge of society: ascetics, for example. How, if they are deprived of their caste and of all family support, can these people be cremated or buried when they die? Who will take care of the funeral rites? For the Newars, this is a singularly important question. Death *guthis* are a collective way of responding to it.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was published in French (Toffin 1975d). The current version has been completely revised for the purposes of this collected

volume and contains considerable additional data, mainly on kinship and marriage. There are also a number of corrections, particularly with respect to the transliteration of Newari words. A new interpretation of death associations (*sī guthis*) is also proposed in the concluding section. I would like to thank Krishna Prasad Rimal and Sushila Manandhar for their help in collecting data in the field. Since the 1975 article first appeared, N. Gutschow has published a short paper on the Citrakārs (1979). See also A. W. Macdonald and A. Vergati Stahl (1979).

2. The figure is from my own census carried out in 1974. C. Rosser (1966: 86) gave a figure of 170 households based on his fieldwork carried out in the mid-1950s.
3. There are also Painter castes called Citrakār in India; see, for example, R. V. Russell (1916: ii. 432–40).
4. Some Citrakār informants suggested to me that Pũ comes from the Sanskrit *nipuṇa*: ‘adroit, skilled’ or *punya*: ‘merit, reward’. These etymologies are doubtful. One Citrakār of Kathmandu also suggests a possible derivation from a Tibetan word *pũ* which, according to him, means ‘a good worker’. In a personal letter (25 Nov. 1993), A. W. Macdonald has written to me that ‘this etymology is doubtful though one of the meanings of *dpon-po* in colloquial Tibetan is “expert; master”’.
5. For information on these frescoes, the oldest of which go back to the end of the fourteenth century (in the Taleju temple in Bhaktapur), see M. Singh (1971: 195 ff.).
6. *Hiti* (Nw. ‘well’).
7. The word *kamaḥ* is a fairly vague term which can be used to designate other social groups not all of which are based on kinship.
8. *Sī guthi*: from *siye*: ‘to die’.
9. These figures were collected in 1974. R. Levy (1990: 97), who stayed in Bhaktapur some years later, gives a figure of 25 Citrakār households.
10. Lākulāchē is a locality situated in the south of the town.
11. *Pulu* (Nw.) = *māndro* (Np.) according to V. P. P. Joshi (1956: 160); for *māndro* Turner (1931: 504) gives ‘cane mat, large mat made of bamboo’.
12. V. P. P. Joshi (1956: 36) translates *kūtāḥ* in Nepali as follows: *bāsko bharen*; *murdā lai jāne khaṭ* = ‘frame made of bamboo, wood to carry a corpse’.
13. *Dīpa*: V. P. P. Joshi (1956: 130) gives the Nepali glosses *masān*, *cyān*, ‘cremation site, cemetery’.
14. Among high castes, this person is replaced by a *jyāpuni*, a woman of the Maharjan caste (G. S. Nepali 1965: 128).
15. G. S. Nepali (1965: 130).
16. ‘Next morning all persons who had accompanied the funeral procession return to the burning place. They make an effigy of the deceased out of his ashes. Two small *Ritha* seeds (*Sapindus Mukorossi*) are used to represent the eyes of the effigy and a conch to represent its mouth. They take five heaps of *bajee* [beaten rice] and boiled rice which are kept at five different places around the effigy—at the legs, hands and one at the head’ (G. S. Nepali 1965: 133). This custom is followed by urban Maharjans but not by the impure castes.
17. G. S. Nepali (1965: 133) writes: ‘Two of the *sana guthi* members are sent to Gokarna with the scalp, two to Sankhamool with one of the shoulder joints, two to Tekdwan with the other shoulder joint and the sixth person, first to Lakha Tirtha

and then to Bhacha Khusi with the knee caps. Places of such disposal are known as the various *tirtha* of the Valley and are sacred both to the Hindus and the Buddhists.'

18. A Citrakār informant in Lalitpur has told me that in his *sī guthi*, the tutelary deity is kept hidden behind the yellow shroud (*dewā*) which is used to cover dead bodies.
19. In Lalitpur, five of the six *sī guthis* organize their feast on the day of Śrī Pañcamī (Māgh, śukla 5) while the remaining *guthi* has its feast on Phāgu Punhi (the full moon day of the month of Phālgun). The *guthi* feast used to last six days; nowadays everything takes place on a single day.
20. However, the structure of the *sī guthis* of the Citrakārs of Lalitpur seems to be modelled on the old lineage organization of the town. Informants there still give a list of six *sī guthis*, corresponding in every detail to the list of six lineages (and their corresponding residential areas) cited above. In general, relations between patrilineal kinship groups and the *sī guthi* funerary associations vary somewhat. In some cases they either coincide or overlap very considerably (e.g. the peasants of Pyangaon and Theco). In other cases, links are rather tenuous (Gellner 1992: 246). On this point, see also Fürer-Haimendorf (1956: 30), who was the first to draw attention to the lineage character of many of the Newar funerary associations.
21. Should one accept this part of the story unreservedly or could it be a mistake on the part of the narrator? It is a well-known fact that in principle Newars bury lepers and those who die of cholera and smallpox, as is the case in India (cf. Stevenson 1920: 153). It is not, however, the first time that I have come across such deviations; in Pyangaon, a Maharjan village in the south of the Kathmandu Valley where I spent several months, people dying of cholera and smallpox were burned if they were more than 3 years old.
22. *Sanāḥ guthi*: from Nw. *sanāḥ* which T. L. Manandhar (1986: 247) derives from Skt. *snāna*, 'bath'. V. P. P. Joshi (1956: 249) glosses *sanā* as '*malāmi*; *malāmi jānu*'. Turner translates *malāmi* as 'a mourner' and *malām* as 'the funeral procession to the place of cremation' (1980: 495).
23. *Deś (des)*: 'a country' (Turner 1980: 319). In Newari (and Nepali), the word *des* carries much the same sense as the French word *pays*, which applies equally to a locality and a country.
24. This day is the eve of the full moon and is called Sī Punhī in Newari (in Bhaktapur, Chyālā Punhī). For information on this festival, see Anderson (1977: 229–30).
25. The festival of Bisket Jātrā takes place on the *saṃkrānti* (the first day of the solar month) of Baiśākh (April–May). On this occasion, the chariots of Bhairava and Bhadrakālī are pulled through the streets of the town: see R. Levy (1990: ch. 14).
26. On this festival, see G. S. Nepali (1965: 357), Slusser (1982: i. 302–3), Toffin (1984: 525–6), and Gellner (1992: 180–6).
27. A *pāthī* is a measurement equivalent to 8 *mānā*. One *pāthī* of paddy weighs approximately 2.5 kg.
28. Colin Rosser makes the same remark about the *sanāḥ guthi* (1966: 97).
29. These two titles, *khaypi* and *chayapi nāyah*, are probably derived from *khaypi* and *chayapi* (Nw.), plates of vegetables, composed of radishes and pumpkins, which are among the eight dishes (*cyāku ghāsātā*) served at ceremonial feasts (*bhway*). The same is presumably true of the *khyahpi nāyah* of Bhaktapur (local pronunci-

- ation). It is not clear how these vegetable dishes have come to designate Citrakār notables.
30. It is on the same day, and in the same place, that the Lalitpur Citrakār *sanāḥ guthis* have their annual meetings.
  31. Cf. Toffin (1984: chs. 7 and 8), Quigley (1985*b*), Gellner (1992: 246–7), and Ishii (forthcoming). See also the interesting remarks on the Mānandhars of Kathmandu by van den Hoek and Shrestha (1992: 64–5).
  32. Other *guthis*, established to ensure the performance of an annual ritual or festival, or dedicated to the worship of a particular deity, existed among the Citrakārs. Let me give two examples. (1) In Lalitpur, five *sālhū* (or *sānhū*) *guthis* are linked to the worship of Būga Dyah (Matsyendranāth) on the first day of the month according to the solar calendar. Turn by turn, members of these associations visit the shrines of Būga Dyah in Bungamati or Lalitpur and worship the deity. When returning, the *guthiyārs* distribute to the other members of the group the offerings of leaves, flowers, and food which have been blessed by the gods (*prasād*) and have a meal. All the members are Citrakārs and membership is purely optional. For this *guthi*, see also Gellner (1992: 243). (2) In Bhaktapur, there are three *pañcadān* (or *pādrā*) *guthis*, each of which is made up of three or four Citrakār households. These associations give alms consisting of some *pāthīs* of paddy to Śākyas and Vajrācāryas on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhādra for the Buddhist festival of Pañcadān. The *pañcadān guthiyārs* erect altars in their quarter of the town and make offerings to the five Buddhas when the procession passes in front of them. In 1974 the *thakāli* of one of these *pañcadān guthis* was the *khyahpi nāyaḥ* of Bhaktapur. Some of these associations have *guthi* lands; membership in them is purely optional.
  33. For more detail on the *de ācārya guthi* and the *lāy guruju* (or *rāj gubhāju*) see Locke (1985: 253–7, 260–2). As Gellner (1992: 237–8) has recently remarked, following Locke (1985), this Vajrācārya *guthi* has never been able to impose its will on its members in religious matters. Furthermore, the Vajrācārya of Lalitpur and Bhaktapur do not have this type of association. However, contrary to what Gellner (1992: 237) reports, I have always taken care to point out the differences between these ‘locality *guthis*’ and true caste councils (Toffin 1984: 215).
  34. On this subject, see, for example, Blunt (1931). Inden (1976: 46) notes that, in the past, in Bengal the word *goṣṭhi* (from which the word *guthi* is derived) was used to mean caste council or *sabhā*.
  35. Fürer-Haimendorf was the first to give prominence to this factor in Newar society (1956: 36–8). Dumont (1964) has also discussed this point. More recently, one should see Quigley (1986).
  36. For India, there is a good description of the beliefs concerning death in Stevenson (1920: 156–92). See also Parry (1980).
  37. *Preta* (Skt.): ‘dead man, corpse; ghost, spirit’ (Macdonell 1929: 188). In Newari the word *agati*: ‘Misfortune, damnation, failure to achieve salvation’ (Turner 1980: 4) refers to a *preta* which is unable to escape its liminal condition.
  38. Stevenson (1920: 180–1).
  39. The expression ‘sacrificial community’ used by van den Hoek and Shrestha (1992: 65) in this regard is interesting. However, their interpretation of the cremation as a final sacrifice which humans must offer does not seem to me to fit the Newar case,

or only partially. Newars consider cremation as a means for the deceased to take his or her leave of human society as much as (if not more than) a self-sacrifice.

40. Death is also a prominent theme of most of the Newars' collective rituals and festivals.



# Low Castes in Lalitpur

*David N. Gellner*

The castes served by good priests are superior to the castes served by degraded priests. Again, the castes served by a barber and a washerman are superior to those who are not. Even among castes served by a barber, a distinction may be drawn based on the question whether the barber pares the nails or not; among the latter, whether he pares the toe nails or not. Nonperformance on the part of this powerful class implies inferiority in every case.

S. V. Ketkar, *The History of Caste in India*, 26

## 1. Introduction

Although there is an enormous amount of anthropological work on caste in South Asia, relatively little has focused primarily on the lowest groups in the hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> There are practical reasons for this, which are poignantly and eloquently described in Michael Moffatt's *An Untouchable Community in South India* (1979). He tried to live with his subjects as an anthropologist is supposed to do, but the total lack of privacy and the extremely deprived living conditions almost led him to abandon the project altogether. He was only able to gather substantial data on social organization when, after leaving his original field site, he moved to another area of Tamil Nadu and started to visit an Untouchable settlement in short daily bursts in the company of a field assistant.<sup>2</sup>

No researcher, whether foreign or Nepalese, has yet attempted participant observation with Newar low castes. It might not, today, be as difficult as Moffatt found it in Tamil Nadu. The sheer poverty is no longer so bad, at least for those living near Kathmandu, because numerous salaried cleaning jobs, which no one else will perform, are now available. But both the social obloquy which low castes face and the concomitant distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean' castes are arguably as severe as ever. This is in spite of the fact that the boundaries between and within 'clean' castes are no longer so fiercely held to and in spite of the fact that (since 1963) caste no longer has any legal status. The fieldworker who lived in a low-caste Newar household would, even today, find

him or herself unwelcome in the homes of most high castes. This is no doubt part of the explanation why anthropological fieldworkers have so far shied away from living with low castes.

This chapter is not then the result of in-depth study and prolonged personal experience in the way that at least some of the others in this book are. There is a considerable need still for fieldwork on Newar low castes, and, if it is ever done, it will certainly modify and quite possibly overturn some of the assertions of this chapter.

The three most important low castes in Lalitpur, as in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur also, are the Khaḍgī (Nāy; Np. Kasāī), the Kāpālī (Jogī; Np. Kusle), and the Dyahḷā (Pwaḥ/Pohryā; Np. Poḍe). In smaller Newar settlements which are none the less multi-caste, such as Panauti, one finds just these three low castes, and no others (Toffin 1984: 278). For clean-caste Newars it is these three who are really important. As Levy puts it, whereas the Khaḍgī and Kāpālī are essential for what they *do*, the Dyahḷā are primarily essential for what they *are*:

The Po(n) [Dyahḷā] have the vital function of making the city's organizing pollution system *real* . . . The Po(n), in their maximal accumulation of poverty and social disability, represent the realization of the important sanction of the bad rebirth resulting from violations of *dharma*, as well as the 'state of nature' resulting from the rejection of the social order. While people tolerate and understand and feel helpless to prevent other groups rejecting their traditional stigmatizing *thar* duties, there is widespread and passionate agreement that the Po(n) must continue their work, and stay in their proper place. They are (as reflective citizens of the city articulate) as essential to the organized city order as are the Brahmans. (Levy 1990: 366–7)

The three main low castes have very distinct socio-religious identities and residence patterns. The Khaḍgīs are known to others as Butchers, though they themselves are today often keen to assert that milk-selling or acting as town crier, not butchering, is their caste specialism. They live in segregated areas on the edges of the old cities. The Kāpālī are death specialists who accept the impure offerings made on the seventh day after a death (*nhaynhūmā*). They are married Śaivite ascetics, just as Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are married Buddhist monks (see Ch. 7). They live in wayside shelters (*phalcā*, *sattaḥ*) scattered throughout the town, though today they have converted many of these into proper houses. Both Khaḍgīs and Kāpālīs are also musicians providing specified types of music on different social and religious occasions. The Dyahḷā are untouchable Sweepers and live in separate localities outside the city walls. Their house styles and layout are different from those of other Newars (Toffin *et al.* 1991); indeed still today they do not refer to themselves as Newars (this was also true of other low castes in the past). As Levy (1990: 76) notes, this usage 'reflects a hesitation by others above them as to whether they are in or out of the [*sic*] Newar society. They are, in fact, uniquely both.'

There are many other numerically small low castes: the Carmakār (Kulu) or Drum-Makers, the Vādyakār (Dwā/Ḍom) or Musicians, the Rajaka (Dhubyā, Dhobi) or Washermen, and the Cyāmkhalah (Cyāme), who are Sweepers and Scavengers. They will be considered again below. Of these some are likely soon to disappear, as other small castes already have. Others, such as the Cyāmkhalah, are not present in great numbers in Lalitpur, but are significant elsewhere.

## 2. History

As a kind of 'traditional' baseline from which to judge the present-day situation, it is worth considering two sources in detail, Jang Bahadur Rana's Law Code (Muluki Ain) of 1854 and the chronicle known as the Bhāṣā Vaṃśāvalī. The Law Code attempted to regulate behaviour, but the model it proposed was derived to a large extent from already established custom. Höfer comes to three conclusions from what the Code says about low castes:

Firstly, we see that not even the untouchable castes are outside the gradation of collective purity/impurity. Secondly, the hierarchy is clearly reflected in a linear conception. Thirdly, for the legislator the hierarchical order seems to result primarily from the de-facto interrelations, as they have 'come to be' among the various castes and which are now codified as such. (Höfer 1979: 99–100)

The Bhāṣā Vaṃśāvalī dates from some time between Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest in 1769 and the 1854 Law Code but it purports to describe the caste system as it was regulated and established by Sthiti Malla long before, at the end of the fourteenth century. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 1, both oral traditions, including those of the low castes themselves, and written chronicles habitually legitimate customs and caste regulations by ascribing them to Sthiti Malla. In so far as the chronicle's rules are based on actual practice, the period it refers to is rather the *end* of the Malla period, i.e. the eighteenth century, and not the time of Sthiti Malla.<sup>3</sup>

The hierarchy of low castes given in the 1854 Law Code is shown in Table 9.1. It had to find a single rank order for both Newar and Parbatiyā castes (not to mention various ethnic groups or tribes not relevant here) even when they did not interact regularly. It will be noted that the category of 'touchable but unclean' castes is filled entirely by Newars and outsiders such as Muslims and foreigners. That is to say, in the Parbatiyā caste system of the hills, except in those places where Newar Butchers have settled, there are only Untouchables, but no unclean, touchable castes. Tibetans and low-status tribals were fitted in just above this level, as clean castes who were 'enslavable alcohol-drinkers' (Höfer 1979: 45). According to the Law Code, the Cyāmkhalah rank lowest because they accept everyone else's polluted food (*juṭho*); the Khadgī rank highest of the low castes because they will not accept rice from any other low

TABLE 9.1. *The hierarchy of low castes according to the Muluki Ain of 1854*

Caste	Caste-specific profession(s)	Ethnicity (N = Newar; P = Parbatiyā)
Castes from whom water may not be accepted but whose touch does not necessitate purification		
Kasāī (Khaḍgī)	Butchers, Milk-Sellers	N
Kusle (Kāpālī)	Death Specialists, Musicians	N
Hindu Dhobi (Rajaka)	Washermen	N
Kulu (Carmakār)	Drum-Makers	N
Musulmān (Muslim)	Bangle-Sellers	other
Mlecch (Westerners)		other
Castes whose touch necessitates purification		
Kāmi	Blacksmiths	} these two groups of equal status
Sārki	Leather-Workers	
Kaḍārā (offspring of Kāmi-Sārki unions)		P
Damāī	Tailors, Musicians	P
Gāine	Minstrels	P
Bādi	Musicians	P
Poḍe (Dyaḥlā)	Sweepers, <i>pīṭh</i> guardians, Scavengers	N
Cyāme (Cyāmkhalah)	Sweepers, Scavengers	N

*Note:* Spelling is as in the Law Code itself (but with honorific equivalents used in the present book given in parentheses for Newar castes).

*Source:* Adapted from Höfer 1979: 45; cf. Macdonald 1975: 282.

castes, whereas the latter accept it from them, and because high castes accept milk from the Khaḍgī. The Kāpālīs' relatively high rank within the low castes is justified in the Law Code by the fact that they serve as sweepers in temples and palaces and that they play music in temples. At this level also, as was equally the case higher up the hierarchy, the Law Code placed Newar castes lower in relation to Parbatiyā castes than they themselves believe they belong. No Newar low castes eat carrion or remove dead cows, as the Sārki do, and they consider themselves superior to the Sārki for that reason (Levy 1990: 104).

The Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī account is much more detailed and gives something of the flavour of traditional views of caste. The chronicle begins by saying that Sthiti Malla established it that

there should be punishments if a caste (*jāt*) abandoned its own prescribed duties (*kārya*) for those of another. Furthermore, low (*sānā*) castes were to have clothes, ornaments, and houses of the following sort. Kasāī [Khaḍgī] were to wear shirts without sleeves. Poḍhyā [Dyahlā] were not to wear hats, upper garments (*lavedā*), shoes, or gold ornaments. Neither Kasāī, Poḍhyā, nor Carmakār [*sic*] were to put tiled roofs on their houses. (Lamshal 1966: 37)

Further on, having described various punishments for inter-caste adultery and marriage, it proceeds to describe the caste hierarchy in detail, specifying for each caste the period of birth and death impurity and the domestic priest. It begins at the bottom, and proceeds upward through the hierarchy. However, it

places the Carmakār or Kulu at the very bottom where one would expect the Cyāmkhalah to be. This leads one to think that the chronicle's author may have confused the two castes.

The caste system (*jātko vyavasthā*): Members of the **Kulu** caste are to have their head shaved and nails cut by their own caste, and likewise to have their rituals of purification at birth and death performed by their own caste. The period of impurity in each case is ten days.<sup>4</sup> At the forty-fifth day after a death they are to make rice balls [for ancestor worship, *śrāddha*], according to the instructions of their own leader, and directed by a knowledgeable person of their own caste. Their profession (*rakam*) is to make leather water-carriers (*kupā*), leather purses, and to strap leather thongs around drums. If they should abandon their caste profession and take up another, they are liable for a fine of 120 rupees. If they are unable to marry within their own caste and bring in a woman of another caste, they should not hide her; and there will be no punishment providing she is from the Śreṣṭhas down to the Kusulyā [Kāpālī] [i.e. providing she is not a Brāhmaṇ].

**Poḍhyā [Dyaḥlā]** caste: they are to shave their own heads and cut their own nails. Birth pollution and ancestor worship are as above. They should not wear matching clothes, nor gold ornaments. They should not enter the city after nightfall without good cause. They are the guardians (*pīvālā*) of power-place (*pīṭh*) goddesses. They should take good care of [these] sacrifice-receiving goddesses (*balidevatā*) and eat the holy offerings (*naivedya*) which they have begged. They may catch, sell, and eat sparrows. They should not touch high (*baḍo*) castes; they should not eat beef; they may eat pork. They are to collect the clothes of dead people, and take a tax [at the cremation ground] of one *dām*.<sup>5</sup> If a woman is about to become a *satī* [i.e. to join her dead husband on the funeral pyre], she should give a matching set of clothes to a Poḍhyānī [a female Dyaḥlā], thus establishing with her a fictive kin relationship. If then, when she lies down with her husband she is unable [to carry through her intention] to die and falls off the funeral pyre, she should go and live with that Poḍhyānī and be of her caste.

**Ḍom [Vādyakār]** caste: [their profession is] to go along with the Kusulyā [Kāpālī] and play the drum, and to live by having their wife work as a dancer. Birth purification is on the second day; forty-fifth day rite as above.

**Ṭaṭi** caste: [their profession is] to weave funeral shrouds for society. They may sell them for 1 rupee each, or 2 rupees in the case of a *satī*. Birth impurity lasts six days, death impurity ten. Their domestic priest is a Gubhāl [Vajrācārya].

**Kusulyā [Kāpālī]** caste: playing wind instruments. Their customary payments are as follows: 12 *dām* for auspicious music [at a festival], 2 rupees for a wedding, 6 *dām* for a first ricefeeding, caste initiation (*brata bandha*), or haircutting ceremony (*cūḍā Karma*). If they do not come when called, they are liable to a 12 rupee fine. If a person calls a different Kāpālī, not their own, there is likewise a 12 rupee fine. They are to beg work in their locality and to eat by sweeping people's courtyards. They are also to eat by dressing as a Kāpālī, playing the double-headed drum, and begging. Birth impurity lasts six days. They bury their dead. Death impurity lasts seven days. They observe the forty-fifth day rite. Their domestic priest comes from their own caste. They work both irrigated and unirrigated fields.

**Kasāī [Khaḍgī]**: nail-cutting and head-shaving is to be done by their own caste. [Their profession is] to play music to accompany death processions. Every Kasāī who

does the work [of playing music] should receive a 3 *dām* customary payment (*dastur*). If they have to play music for a *satī*, the group should be given 1 rupee in addition to each player's 3 *dām*.<sup>6</sup> If they have to butcher a buffalo for people's ritual celebrations (*kām kāj*), they should kill the buffalo as soon as they receive the payment of 1 *paisā*.<sup>7</sup> They should not kill a buffalo which has received a *ṭikā* on this side of the river. This meat should not be sold to noble people (*bhala ādmi*). If they have to kill buffaloes for people on open ground, they should not do so without the king's tax of 1 rupee being paid. If the buffalo has to be cut in order to sell the meat, then the king's tax is double. If people are having a wild boar killed, the head should be offered to the king (*sarkār*), and the butcher may himself take the tax of 1 rupee 8 *ānnā*.<sup>8</sup> The butcher should cut up meat [for the customer]. They are not to sell milk or yoghurt to castes higher than themselves, nor to give them ghee. Birth impurity lasts six days, death impurity and the forty-fifth day rite are as above. They work irrigated fields. Their domestic priest is the Nāī Gubhāl [Nāy Gubhāju]. (Lamshal 1966: 45–6)

The Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī continues with a large number of small ritual specialist castes who are considered low but clean. In fact, of those listed above, the Ṭaṭi no longer exist (and may not have been 'unclean' even when they did, since the chronicle lists their priest as a Vajrācārya); the Ḍom (Vādyakār) are neither numerous nor significant for the caste system as a whole. The Kulu or Carmakār are also few in number and they too are probably beginning to disappear. Strangely, the Cyāmkhalah do not figure at all in this account; as noted above, the Carmakār (Kulu), who are not in fact 'untouchable' but only 'unclean', have been put in their place at the bottom of the hierarchy. This will be discussed further below.

Some of the information given by the chronicle is not known to low castes today, notably what it says about *satī*. The prohibition on Khadgīs selling milk or milk products is interesting, in that, as we have seen, the 1854 Law Code recognized this as one of their caste specialities. It is indeed one that the Khadgīs themselves emphasize. (The implication is, 'How can we be low when clean castes accept milk—which everyone knows to be frequently adulterated with water—from us?') Perhaps the chronicler wished to suggest that this should not be allowed. None the less, in spite of these anachronisms and possible biases on the part of the chronicler, the Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī represents very well the spirit of the traditional system.

### 3. Castes in Detail

What is known about different castes, both from my own and others' work, will now be presented, taking the rank order of the 1854 Law Code.<sup>9</sup> Much more research with elderly people knowledgeable about the older order of caste interaction would be necessary to provide an account which is anthropologically satisfactory.

### 3.1. *Khaḍgī*

The *Khaḍgī* are the aristocrats of the low castes. They are more numerous than the others<sup>10</sup>—there is a kind of safety and strength in numbers—and there are more well-off families among them than among other low castes. In the past they shared in general low-caste poverty. It is said that if they became rich the king would simply confiscate their wealth (Wegner 1988: 10). None the less, by the Rana period a few of their number were comparatively rich and some were well connected. As a consequence one can see in some *Khaḍgī* localities, such as *Tāpā Hiti*, *Lalitpur*, impressive old houses with elaborate stucco work. Today many *Khaḍgīs* have earned considerable amounts of money selling meat, the demand for which has grown as Kathmandu has boomed. Others have prospered as taxi-owners, drivers, mechanics, or vegetable-sellers. For example, the fact that *Sundar Lal Khaḍgi*, a milk-seller from Kathmandu, gave gold ornaments worth 150,000 rupees to the divinity *Karuṇāmaya-Matsyendranāth* was much discussed in 1991. A few *Khaḍgīs* have acquired a university education and some of these have attempted to ‘pass’, that is, to conceal their caste identity, by writing their surname as *Khaḍga* (requiring the omission only of the final ‘ī’)—a common *Parbatiyā Chetri* name. In rural areas, however, *Khaḍgīs* have remained poor, mostly earning a living as agricultural labourers.<sup>11</sup>

The main traditional professions which account for *Khaḍgī* low status are, as we have seen already, butchering and providing music for the funeral processions of high castes.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the *Khaḍgīs’* drumming is an auspicious and essential accompaniment to most big calendrical festivals as well as for lavishly celebrated private rituals. Sacrificial butchering and ceremonial music are combined in the celebration of *Mohanī* (*Dasāī*) when the hereditary leaders (*nāyah*) of the caste sacrifice buffaloes at the royal palace of each of the three cities (for *Bhaktapur*, see Wegner 1988: 24–5). Before 1951 *Khaḍgīs* had another function also: they were town criers who prefaced royal proclamations with drumming. It has already been noted that milk-selling was also a caste speciality by the nineteenth century, even though the *Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī* claimed that *Sthiti Malla* forbade it.

There is another important role in the ritual division of labour which falls to the *Khaḍgī* (see Table 9.2). Certain *Khaḍgī* women act as the *Nauni* (Barber woman) to low clean castes such as the *Taṇḍukār*, *Vyañjankār*, *Citrakār*, *Mānandhar*, *Karamjit*, and *Rājibāhak* (*Putuwār*), i.e. the castes of bloc IV (see Ch. 1). That is, they cut or touch their nails in order to render the feet pure before a major ritual. *Nāpits* (that is, men or women of the Barber caste) will cut the hair of these castes, but consider them too low to touch their feet (cf. Plate 14). Although *Khaḍgīs* are willing to provide the toe-nail specialists for bloc IV, they will not nowadays eat rice cooked by these castes (cf. Nepali 1965: 177; Toffin 1984: 281, p. 112 above).

TABLE 9.2. *Provision of ritual services to different categories of Newars*

Service	Blocs I–III	Nāpit	Other Bloc IV	Recipient Khaḍgī	Kāpālī	Dyaḥlā
Priesthood ♂	Brāhmaṇ or Vajrācārya	Vajrācārya	Brāhmaṇ or Vajrācārya	Nāy Gubhāju (Taṇḍukār)	own-caste	own-caste
Auspicious barbering ♂ or ♀	Nāpit, MB or MB plus Nāpit	MB	MB or MB plus Nāpit	MB or MB plus Nāpit	MB or MB plus lower sub-caste	MB
Inauspicious barbering ♂ or ♀	Nāpit	any friend or relative	Nāpit	Nāpit or own caste	lower sub-caste	any friend or relative
Auspicious toe-nail- touching or -cutting ♀ or ♂	Nāpit	any friend or relative	Khaḍgī	FZ	lower sub-caste	not done
Inauspicious toe- nail-touching or -cutting ♀ or ♂	Nāpit	any friend or relative	Khaḍgī	own-caste or self	lower sub-caste	any friend or relative
Cutting umbilical cord ♀	Śuddhakār (Katāḥ) or Khaḍgī	Khaḍgī	Khaḍgī	senior unwidowed woman or midwife	midwife	midwife or senior woman
Accepting death offerings ♂ or ♀	Kāpālī	Kāpālī	Kāpālī	Kāpālī (Dom Jogi)	lower sub-caste	'Halahulū'

*Note:* For the definition of the caste blocs, see Ch. 1. 'Own-caste' is short for 'a specialist of one's own caste' (i.e. someone specializing in providing this service, not a relative), and 'lower sub-caste' refers to a similar specialist of the same caste but lower status. Auspicious barbering and toe-nail-cutting (or -touching) occur at purifications marking the *beginning* of rites such as caste initiations. Inauspicious barbering and toe-nail-cutting occur at the *end* of periods of impurity incurred by birth and death. For the opposition between these two types of purification, see R. P. Pradhan (1986: 60–70) and Gellner (1992: 144–5). Barbering is seen primarily as a male activity and toe-nail-cutting a female one, but either can be performed by the other, if need be. The preferred sex is shown first.



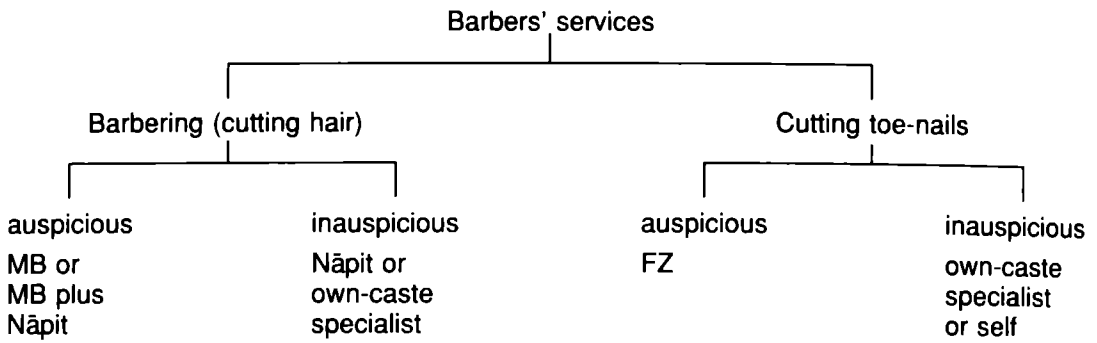


FIG. 9.1. Types of barbering service and how they are provided for Khadgīs

What this shows, as illustrated in Table 9.2, is that barbering really consists of two separable services, for hair and for feet. A single Nāpit couple can provide both services for high- and middle-caste households. But for the castes of blocks IV, V, and VI these services have to be distinguished. That this is frequently the case in India also is shown by the epigraph (above) from Ketkar.

Furthermore, consideration of the barbering and toe-nail-cutting services as received by low castes forces one to recognize a further crucial distinction which is only implicit in high-caste practice, namely, that between auspicious and inauspicious occasions for each service (see Fig. 9.1). Even then, there is sometimes a choice. In auspicious Khadgī life-cycle rituals, such as the boy's caste initiation ritual of *kaytā pūjā*, the mother's brother either cuts the hair himself (the cheaper option) or must symbolically begin the task: to do this he makes three feigned cuts with a gold knife and three with a silver, and then the hair is actually cut off by the Barber.

This combination of mother's brother and Barber is commonly found both among the low clean castes of bloc IV and among all higher castes except Śākya and Vajrācāryas.<sup>13</sup> An important difference, however, is that whereas among caste blocs II and III the MB never substitutes for the Barber, and his role is always symbolic and occasionally even omitted, among the castes of bloc IV and below the MB can actually replace the Barber. If today blocs I–III omit to call the Barber, it is because the whole ceremony has been made even more purely symbolic. Traditionally the first hair-cutting is done at the separate *busākhā* (tonsure, lit. 'birth-hair shaving') ceremony at around 5 years of age; but today many households of all castes combine it in one ritual with *kaytā pūjā* at 7, 9, or 11. Since today the boy has to go to school, the Barber may be dispensed with at *busākhā*, and even at *kaytā pūjā* he cuts the hair, rather than shaving it off.

Interestingly, the Khadgī women specialists do not cut the nails of Nāpits themselves (though the Nāpits are of the same status as the castes listed, i.e. of bloc IV); Nāpits provide barbering and nail-cutting services for each other on an informal exchange basis within the caste. Amongst the Khadgī it is the

father's sisters (*ninipī*) who provide the nail-cutting service at auspicious life-cycle rituals, while their own Khaḍgī specialists do it at death rituals. The distinction I have drawn between auspicious and inauspicious rituals is expressed by them as that between *sukha* (happy) and *dukha* (sad, painful) occasions. The FZ and MB are not appropriate at 'sad' occasions.

Khaḍgī women specialists also cut babies' umbilical cords: in many places they do so for all clean castes; in urban centres with a more elaborate caste structure they do so for low clean castes and a *Katāḥnī* (i.e. a *Katāḥ*/Śuddhakār woman) does so for middle and high castes.<sup>14</sup> Among Khaḍgī themselves the cord is cut by the seniormost unwidowed woman of the household or lineage; or, in some cases, by the midwife (who is usually a Maharjan). The ritualization of cutting the umbilical cord is in rapid decline, however, as it becomes more and more normal for women to give birth in hospital, where considerations of caste purity do not apply (at least at this level of detail).

Myths of Khaḍgī origin focus on the 'conquest' of the Kathmandu Valley by Harisimhadeva (actually it was a flight to Nepal in 1326 after Muslim invasions). The Khaḍgī are supposed to be descendants of a courtier of *kṣatriya* status (or in some versions of a Maharjan man). On their journey to the Kathmandu Valley they were hungry, so the king prayed for advice to his tutelary goddess, Taleju. She told him that they would find a wild buffalo and that they should choose for the task of sacrificing it the man whom they found defecating with his back to the rising sun.<sup>15</sup> This sacrificial function accounts for the honorific name, Khaḍgī, meaning 'holder of the sword'. In versions told by Khaḍgīs themselves the man chosen was none other than the son of Harisimhadeva himself, so that, in spite of their low status, they are not just *kṣatriyas*, but a king's sons, in origin. Thus it is that many take the royal-sounding surname, *Śāhī*, which some claim disguises their caste identity (not from Newars). (Those who call themselves Khaḍgī say that 'Śāhī' has only been adopted in the last thirty years or so.)

The Khaḍgīs' non-honorific name, *Nāy*, is the basis for a folk etymology, from 'Nayar' (e.g. Manandhar 1986: 128). On this account the Khaḍgī were Nayars who settled in Nepal after a still earlier invasion of Nepal, this one by the king of Mithilā, *Nānyadeva*, who was of south Indian origin. (As with Harisimhadeva, the nineteenth-century chronicles and oral tradition incorrectly claim *Nānyadeva* as the founder of a Nepalese dynasty and place his invasion in the late ninth rather than the early twelfth century.) In Nepali the Khaḍgī are known as 'Kasāī', meaning butcher.<sup>16</sup>

Both 'Nāy' and 'Kasāī' are terms used with considerable pejorative force by higher castes. 'Nāy' are supposed to be vulgar and loud, and their women both sexually attractive and available. Consequently both these latter designations are rejected by young, educated, and would-be upwardly mobile Khaḍgīs and *Śāhīs*. It is an interesting fact that whereas young Maharjan resentment tends

to be focused on Śreṣṭhas (probably because so many of those who claim this high-caste status today actually come from castes which by a traditional reckoning are distinctly lower than the Maharjans), young Khaḍgīs' anger is vented rather against Śākya and Vajrācāryas. The reason for the latter is that Śākya and Vajrācāryas are as insistent on excluding Khaḍgīs (and *a fortiori* still lower castes) from their social space as any other Newars; and yet they are the bearers of a religion—Buddhism—which even in its traditional form claims to be available to all beings alike. Furthermore, Śākya and Vajrācāryas are increasingly insistent on the Buddhist virtue of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence, literally 'absence of the desire to kill'). They are correspondingly vehement about the sinfulness of killing animals, especially sacrificing them to gods. Yet at the same time they are as attached as ever to meat, both to eat and to offer in Tantric Buddhist rituals. In the Khaḍgīs' view this is sheer hypocrisy: 'They tell us killing is wrong and yet queue up for meat every morning.'

The whole question of sacrifice and responsibility is a complex one. All Newars, both Buddhist and Hindu, believe that it is to some degree sinful for butchers to kill animals, even when it is a sacrifice to a god, and even when they believe such sacrifice is necessary and can be expiated. Khaḍgīs themselves share this belief to a greater or lesser extent. Those who practise sacrificial killing wait for the sponsor of the sacrifice to give the word (*bacā*) before going ahead, so that responsibility rests with him. In all animal sacrifices, whether performed by a Khaḍgī or not, the animal is sprinkled with water, and everyone waits until the animal shakes himself, a procedure called *mū hāykegu*. This shaking is said to be the animal's giving its consent to be sacrificed. In spite of these defences, Khaḍgīs are in many cases happy to give up what is generally perceived to be a sinful way of life. Some educated Khaḍgīs give up eating pork and a few even give up buffalo meat.

On the other hand, I met one educated young Khaḍgī who continued to sell meat every morning (which he bought from other Khaḍgīs) because this was his family's tradition which his mother thought it right to keep up; the family did not need the income since it had other more profitable lines of business. Moreover, as Levy (1990: 320 ff.) has discussed, animal sacrifice is a *duty* in Tantric Hinduism, a duty that the sacrificer, even if a Brāhmaṇ, must perform himself, at least in esoteric contexts, providing he has the necessary Tantric Initiation. The acceptance of this necessity is, Levy argues, the 'leap of faith' that marks adherence to the dominant Hindu ideology of Bhaktapur.

Khaḍgīs have their own localities as will be seen from Fig. 9.2. They are at the edge of the city of Lalitpur, but, unlike those of the Dyahḷā, they are inside the old city walls. Unlike many other castes of the big cities, Khaḍgīs seem always to have married at a considerable distance—between all three big cities and beyond. Table 9.3 suggests that there is no preference for settlement endogamy, as there is on the part of Lalitpur Maharjans and Śākya. The Khaḍgī population within Lalitpur is sufficiently numerous for a higher level of

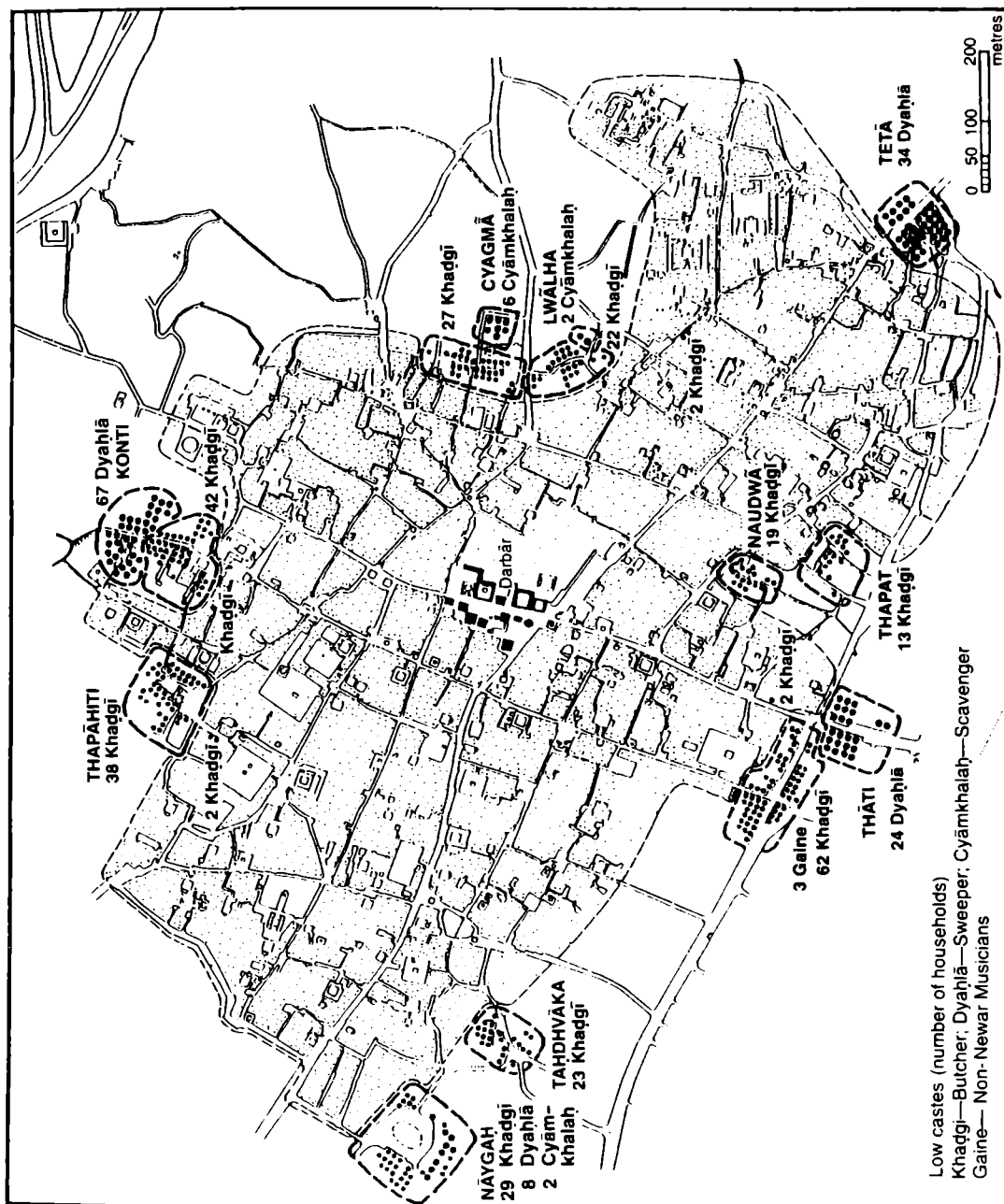


FIG. 9.2. Map of Lalitpur showing low-caste localities and houses  
*Source:* N. Gutschow and N. Sharma.

TABLE 9.3. *Origin of same-caste brides and husbands in four Khadgī lineages as recorded in genealogies collected by the author (in percentages)*

Place of birth	Lineage 1 (Lalitpur)		Lineage 2 (Lalitpur)		Lineage 3 (Kopundol <sup>a</sup> )		Lineage 4 (Kathmandu)	
	W (N = 10)	H (N = 7)	W (N = 100)	H (N = 51)	W (N = 13)	H (N = 13)	W (N = 17)	H (N = 7)
Kathmandu	80	86	58	76	46	69	65	71
Lalitpur	20	14	21	8	8	15	17.5	29
Bhaktapur	0	0	2	2	23	8	0	0
Other <sup>b</sup>	0	0	19	14	23	8	17.5	0
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: W = wives; H = husbands of married-out daughters.

Inter-caste unions have been excluded.

<sup>a</sup> Kopundol is within the boundaries of modern Lalitpur, but outside the old city on the way to Kathmandu. This lineage is originally from Kathmandu.

<sup>b</sup> e.g. Satungal, Panauti, Kirtipur.

endogamy to be possible, were it desired. The high number of marriages within Kathmandu of lineage 4 (as indeed the preponderance of Kathmandu in the other columns also) is to be explained by the fact that the Khadgī population of greater Kathmandu is certainly much larger than that of Lalitpur or Bhaktapur, so that there is a correspondingly higher number of available spouses. Interestingly, whereas Khadgīs in Panauti have the highest level of settlement exogamy (96%) of any caste there (Toffin 1984: 407), data from Dhulikhel contradict the general Khadgī pattern. Of 50 Khadgī marriages recorded by Quigley,<sup>17</sup> 24 brides came from within Dhulikhel, 17 from nearby towns such as Banepa and Panauti, 3 from Bhaktapur, 2 from Kathmandu, one from Pokhara, and 3 were Tamangs. Perhaps the Khadgīs of Dhulikhel have been influenced by the highly endogamous, locally dominant Śreṣṭhas.

Like other Newars, Khadgīs do not marry anyone remembered to be related agnatically, even if all connections have long been severed. Those who share the same lineage deity should never intermarry, they say. Although relatives 'up to five generations' observe death pollution for each other, they do not perform lineage deity worship together (as would be the case among higher castes). Lineage deity worship is performed in separate households (and apparently this has always been so); this is justified in terms of the high cost of doing it any other way. Lineage solidarity is still apparent, however, in the common observance of pollution on the death of a lineage member.

The most important *guthi* for Khadgīs is the death (*sanāḥ*) *guthi*. There is one in each locality. The god of the *guthi* is surrounded by many fearsome taboos. Outsiders may never see it, and women may look on it only once a year on the days when the *guthi*'s feasts are held. An elder of the *guthi* enjoys considerable respect. The elders perform the ritual of *śi kāyegu* each year. In

this the head of the sacrificed buffalo is divided according to a strict order of seniority. (Khaḍgīs seem to perform this ritual regularly, in this context as well as within the household, while other Newars do so only occasionally.) The death *guthi* and its god seem to have for Khaḍgīs the identity-reinforcing functions which for higher castes are fulfilled by the lineage deity *guthi* and (where present) the Tantric shrine (*āgā*).

The Khaḍgīs' relatively high rank among low castes is certainly to be connected to the fact that, to a greater extent than any other low caste, they reproduce the inter-caste service system of the high castes. They are the only low caste served by the Kāpālī at death; and they are the only low caste to have priests of a higher rank than themselves. These are the so-called Nāy Gubhāju, i.e. Khaḍgī Vajrācārya. By caste the latter are in fact an extended family of Taṇḍukār (Khusaḥ); their position is discussed elsewhere (Ch. 5). Towards the Dyaḥlā, who frequently live nearby, but outside the city walls, the Khaḍgī are as fiercely exclusive as high castes. They are sufficiently numerous and assertive for the Dyaḥlā to fear their anger.

In spite of enjoying the services of these specialists, on other occasions ritual services are provided for Khaḍgīs by their own relatives where high castes would have other castes perform them (see Table 9.2). At auspicious life-crisis rituals the nails of all members of the household are touched or cut by the father's sister(s) of the person going through the ritual. At death this is done by a Khaḍgī specialist, not someone of another, lower caste. The father's sister or married daughter accompanies the funeral procession throwing paddy (*wā hwalegu*), where high castes have a Maharjan woman (normally the wife of their tenant) perform this service. The mother's brother (*pāju*) likewise acts as a barber at auspicious life-cycle rites, pretending to cut the hair, which is caught (*phāykegu*) on a ritual plate by the father's sister (*nini*). (As noted above, the actual cutting is done by a Nāpit if the family can afford it; the role of the father's sister here is identical for all Newars, high-caste and low.) After the birth of a child, the umbilical cord is cut by the seniormost unwidowed woman of the household, where clean castes have this done for them by a Śuddhakār or Khaḍgī woman. In all these cases we have what Moffatt calls code-switching: a low caste uses specified kin (or a same-caste specialist at death) to do what is performed for high castes by a specialist of a different caste.

It is particularly interesting that the various substitutions made by the Khaḍgī reveal crucial distinctions (between barbering and toe-nail-cutting, between auspicious and inauspicious occasions for each) that are not immediately evident from the practice of high castes, since they simply use a Nāpit man and wife for all occasions. While high and middle castes employ more different specialists, the very restrictions placed upon low castes force them to distinguish explicitly more types of context in the *use* of specialists, as shown in Fig. 9.1. This was rather an unexpected finding.

### 3.2. Kāpālī

The Kāpālī are considerably fewer in number than the Khaḍgī, but they have an equally important place in Newar society. Like the Khaḍgī, they are musicians, but of wind instruments, not drums. Their music is required at festivals and at life-cycle rituals which are celebrated with panache. At high-caste Newar weddings they have today lost out completely to the modern 'band' music of well-organized Damāī groups. (The Damāī are a Parbatiyā low caste, like the Kāpālīs in being tailors and playing wind instruments, but unlike them in being Untouchables.) Kāpālīs are still required, however, for temple music. Even more so, every clean-caste family needs a Kāpālī as a death specialist: the domestic priest, the Barber (Nāpit), and the Kāpālī, these three are essential. Kāpālīs also accept death offerings from Khaḍgīs, thus indicating that they accept the latter's superiority to them. Increasingly, Kāpālīs are abandoning their specialism and the offerings on the seventh day (*nhaynhūmā*) have to be fed to dogs.

This role as death specialists is to be related, as is the surname Kāpālī, to a historical link with Kāpālīka ascetics who wandered through India in the first millennium, deliberately courting the contempt of, and inverting the practices of, polite society. The Newar Kāpālīs' colloquial epithet, Jogi (= *yogī/yogin*),



PLATE 18. Three Kāpālī men playing Nepalese oboes (*mwāhli*) lead a procession of Śākyas from Uku Bāhāḥ celebrating the third old-age initiation ritual of a Śākyā man (*swakwa burā jākwa*). (D. N. Gellner)



relates also to this heritage. Similar low-status householder ascetic castes, also known as Jogi, are found throughout India and also in east Nepal.<sup>18</sup> These non-Newar Jogis seem to lack the Kāpālīs' role as death specialists, which in India is usually filled by Mahābrāhmaṇs. The only exception I have found is in the Indian Himalayas near Simla. Here a caste of Nāth Jogis fills exactly the position of the Kāpālī among the Newars: they accept death offerings, both the dead person's clothes and the food in the dead person's name. In addition, though burying their own dead, they cremate the dead of other castes (H. A. Rose 1914: Y. ii. 399 n.; iii. 165). Less widespread, but also found, are higher-status castes of householder ascetics known as Saṃnyāsī. In Kangra these Saṃnyāsī are funeral priests employed for the death rituals from the thirteenth day up to the fourth year, and they count as degraded Brāhmaṇs (Parry 1979: 65, 106). In the Nepalese hills the Saṃnyāsī intermarry with the high-status Chetris, and have no priestly functions (Bouillier 1979).

The Kāpālīs today are a caste of married householders, in the same way that Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are married monks, as already noted. Like Śākyas and Vajrācāryas they act out their socio-religious identity occasionally. During the month of Māgh (R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 171) Kāpālī men dress as Śaivite *yogins* and beg. (A Maharjan man pointed out: 'They are higher than the Dyaḥlā because they don't beg just any time.') It has also been noted above that traditionally the Kāpālī live not in ordinary houses but in wayside shelters dotted about the town. Thus it is possible to have an essential low-caste specialist at hand in each locality, while not permitting him to live in the city properly speaking. These two-storey shelters were usually open on the ground floor and the Kāpālīs would carry on their tailoring trade there during the day. Some can still be seen doing this today. That each locality should have its own Kāpālī is suggested by the Newari name of the death specialist, *twājā* (from *twāḥ* + *jana*), literally 'locality person' (Joshi 1987: s.v.).

The major practice which marks the Kāpālī off as different from other Newars, and this is widely known, is burial rather than cremation of the dead. The corpse is put in a cross-legged meditation posture, and adorned with ash, begging bowl, ascetic's bag, and so on, and carried thus to the burial ground (cf. R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 177). In Lalitpur there were four Kāpālī graveyards traditionally, one in each of the cardinal directions, but only the northern one is in general use today. Burial is the standard practice for Śaivite ascetics in contemporary Hinduism, and is followed also by other similar groups of married ascetics in South Asia, both low-status Jogis and the higher-status Saṃnyāsī.

Not only have the Kāpālī kept up these renouncer practices, they have also maintained contacts with the Indian inheritors of the Kāpālīka tradition, the Kānphaṭā or Nāth *yogins*. The latter frequently visit Nepal and Kāpālīs have often gone to India with them. This contact explains the other names of the Kāpālī: sometimes they use Darśandhārī ('holder of the system') as a surname,



a common Kānphaṭā epithet; and another such epithet, Kuśalnāth (a founder's name, presumably), is supposed to be the origin of the term by which the caste is known in Nepali, 'Kusle'. Several small temples to Gorakhnāth in the Valley are used for worship both by the Kāpālī and by Kānphaṭās. Another, folk, etymology for the name 'Kusle' derives it from *kuśa* grass. According to a long legend which relates the origin of the Kāpālīs, the god Śiva made the first Kāpālī from *kuśa* grass. Subsequently the Kāpālī went on long travels in which he became the pupil of Jālandhar, an important Nāth *yogin*, and met others, including Karuṇāmaya/Matsyendranāth (this last reference ties the Kāpālī in to local Buddhist myths especially important in Lalitpur).<sup>19</sup>

The Kāpālī have the right to be god-guardians at the temples of many 'blood-drinking' gods and goddesses, for example, Bagalāmukhī in Lalitpur, Bāgh Bhairav in Kirtipur, and the Bhīmsen temples in Lalitpur, Kathmandu, and Bhaktapur. Although Bhīmsen is popularly and iconographically represented as one of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, the name is also an epithet of Śiva's fierce form, Bhairava. R. K. Vajracharya notes the Kāpālīs' special connection with Bhairava:

They are called Kapālī [*sic*] because they are followers of the secret Kaula tradition. They are completely Śaivite. They worship Paśupatināth as Bhairava, have established



PLATE 19. The Kāpālī god-guardian of the goddess Bagalāmukhī, in the compound of the great Śiva temple of Kumbheśvar, Lalitpur, prepares for a buffalo sacrifice. (D. N. Gellner)

various Bhairavas, and offer animal sacrifice to them. During Yēnyāḥ [Indra Jātrā] they have the tradition of sacrificing to the chariot of Bhairava which accompanies the [Royal] Kumārī. (R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 171)

Only those Kāpālī men who have tantric initiation should come to receive the seventh-day offerings after death. (A Kāpālī who has not taken Tantric initiation is given it on his or her death-bed.) They are supposed to accept the offerings while muttering a mantra of Bhairava; they then take them home, and eat them.<sup>20</sup> Although Kāpālīs themselves sometimes deny this, the logic of the ritual seems clear: the Kāpālī incarnates the dead person in the state of a ghost (*pret*) in the period immediately after death and before attaining the status of an ancestor (*pitṛ*) (cf. Toffin 1984: 148; Levy 1990: 369). At every feast held in normal times, the Kāpālī comes to receive a share put out in the name of all the dead of the family. Here, after a death, he takes the food of the dead person, one serving for each day since the death. The food has been cooked outside the house by the married-out daughters. The Kāpālī takes it, digests it, and goes away. The Kāpālī also takes the dead person's clothes thrown at the *chmāsā* stone. These are impure and inauspicious tasks which young and modern-educated Kāpālīs are refusing to perform. Like the Karamjit (Bhāḥ) (i.e. the Mahābrāhmaṇ), a Hindu equivalent who takes ten shares of food on the tenth day from high-caste Hindus,<sup>21</sup> the Kāpālī are trying to avoid their caste identity in whatever way they can.

However, Véronique Bouillier has convincingly questioned the identification often made, both by high-caste Newars and by anthropologists, between the Kāpālī as death specialists and Mahābrāhmaṇs; and this may explain why Kāpālīs themselves feel that they have good reason to deny that they incarnate the dead. (1) Kāpālī death specialists consume the dead person's food, not just on the seventh day, but throughout the year, and indeed at every regular festival. (2) Their rituals are similar to those of the Kānpḥaṭās:

[these rituals] associate the Kusle [Kāpālī] rather with the function of exorcist. Do they really incarnate the dead by consuming the food destined for them, like Mahābrāhmaṇs, or is it not rather that, like Gorakhnāth propitiating Bhairava on Brahmā's behalf, they ensure the protection of creation and the living, the removal of death and the dead from the world, and the final pacification of dangerous forces? (Bouillier 1993: 101)

The roles of priest, barber, and receiver of death-offerings are filled for the Kāpālīs themselves by other Kāpālīs. The barber and receiver of death-offerings come from a lower Kāpālī sub-caste called Danyā or Daniyā, also referred to as Nāpi or Byepālī. The Dom or Dom Jogi are another separate sub-caste, said to be the offspring of Kāpālī men and lower-caste wives; it is they who accept the *nhaynhūmā* offerings of the Khaḍgī.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the Khaḍgī, among the Kāpālī the FZ does not perform the 'nail-touching' ritual at life-cycle rites (R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 171–80).

In the last few years the Kāpālī have begun to abandon the traditional caste initiation rite, which R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 173) refers to as *jogi chuye*, 'beginning to be a Jogi', and which Kirtipur Kāpālīs called *mwāhālī pithanegu*, 'bringing out the oboe'. This lasted all night and all day and was performed under a knowledgeable Kāpālī *guru*.<sup>23</sup> Now, in imitation of other castes, a *kāyṭā pūjā* caste initiation is performed instead by their 'Gubhāju' priest.

### 3.3. Rajaka (Dhubyā)

The Rajaka or Washermen are a small caste, omitted by Rosser (1966: 86) from his list. They are different from the Sāgha, who are ex-Washermen. The latter were reputedly raised to clean-caste status by Lakṣmī Narasiṃha Malla, king of Kathmandu from 1619 to 1641, because he had two Sāgha sisters as concubines.<sup>24</sup> The Rajaka are known colloquially as Dhubyā or Dhobi. They are supposed to have accompanied Harisiṃhadeva from Mithilā and indeed some still speak Hindi and marry in India; some of the women wear nose ornaments (*phulī*), which Newar women never normally do. Most Bhaktapur Newars do not consider them to be Newars (Levy 1990: 88). Yet, according to Toffin (1984: 591), they still regard themselves as Newars. Unlike other low castes they have Brāhmaṇ domestic priests. As with the Khaḍgī and Kāpālī, Rajaka girls do not need to go through the ritual of mock marriage (*ihī*); but unlike Khaḍgī or Kāpālī girls, they do not go through the twelve-day confinement ritual either (R. K. Vajracharya 1989: 168). As in Kangra (Parry 1979: 58), the services of a Washerman are not considered ritually essential by high castes.

### 3.4. Carmakār (Kulu)

The Carmakār are leather-workers, as their surname states, but unlike the Parbatiyā Sārki, they are not Untouchables. As noted above in discussing the Bhāṣā Vaṃśāvalī, there is sometimes confusion between them and the Cyāmkhalaḥ.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that the name 'Cyāme', the root of 'Cyāmkhalaḥ', derives from the same word, *carma*, leather, as 'Carmakār' (like the name of the large and widespread north Indian untouchable caste, the Camārs). Perhaps in the Malla period the Carmakār were only tanners, and therefore not untouchable, whereas the Cyāmkhalaḥ removed and cut up dead cows, making them distinctly lower. Today the Sārki monopolize shoe production and the Carmakār tend to be drum-makers.<sup>26</sup> According to R. K. Vajracharya's informant (1989: 155), Carmakār girls must go through both the mock marriage and confinement rituals.

### 3.5. Vādyakār/Bādikār (Dom/Dwā)

In the 1854 Law Code the Vādyakār ('musicians') are run together with the Carmakār in a single compound which combines their non-honorific epithets:

Kuludom ('Kulu' + 'Dom'). According to Toffin (1984: 307 n. 17), they are in fact distinct from both the Carmakār and the Kāpālī, and they make use of the Khadgīs' priests (ibid. 230). According to Bouillier's research, cited above, they are a lower-status Kāpālī sub-caste.<sup>27</sup>

These Newar Vādyakār must be distinct from the Bādi mentioned by the Law Code, since the latter are Untouchables; for the same reason they are also distinct from the Dom of India, even though their socio-religious identity and name is the same. There are supposed to be five or six households of Vādyakār in Lalitpur and it is said that they live from selling vegetables and curios in Mangal Bazaar.

### 3.6. Dyahḷā and Cyāmkhalah

We come now to the untouchable castes, the principal of which is the Dyahḷā, known in Nepali as 'Poḍe', a name the Dyahḷā themselves do not reject. Some say that it derives from Poṇḍū, in Bengal, because the Dyahḷā originally came from there.<sup>28</sup> The Lalitpur Dyahḷā are settled in four localities, each in a cardinal direction. This orientation was surely a deliberate piece of town planning, even though a similarly neat Dyahḷā settlement pattern seems not to exist in other Newar towns or cities. Each locality is attached to specific *pīṭh* gods or goddesses, as shown in Table 9.4. The eight Mother Goddesses form a protective ring around the city; however, only five of the set have temples and only at four (Sikabahīdyah, Bāl Kumārī, Mahālakṣmī, and Yappādyah) do Dyahḷā serve as god-guardians on a daily basis (see Plate 10).<sup>29</sup> The Dyahḷā have the right to keep offerings made there, a month at a time by turns. It is said that even high castes will accept the goddess's concrete blessings (*prasād*), i.e. flowers or food, from the hands of the god-guardian at such a shrine.

At the temple of Sikabahīdyah there are currently about 150 men from Poḍe Twāḥ, Kumbheśvar, with the right to be god-guardian, so turns come round only after many years. The right is inherited patrilineally. Those men who have settled near their mother's brother's house, which occasionally happens, have no such rights, but retain them in the place they or their father came from.<sup>30</sup> In

TABLE 9.4. *Lalitpur Dyahḷā localities and their associations with pīṭh divinities*

Cardinal direction	Locality	Number of households	<i>pīṭh</i> goddess(es) and/or Bhairava
N	Kumbheśvar/ Konti	67	Sikabahīdyah (Cāmuṇḍā); Dhātīlā Vārāhī
E	Tyētā	34	Bāl Kumārī
S	Thati, Lagankhel	24	Mahālakṣmī; Baṭuk Bhairav
W	Nagāmay, Pūcwaḥ	8	Yappādyah (Vaiṣṇavī)

*Note:* Household numbers are based on an unpublished 1993 survey by Nutan Sharma.

In Lalitpur only five of the eight mother goddesses have temples; the other three are simply stones. Baṭuk Bhairav is a separate temple on the south side of the city.

addition to this connection to Sikabāhīdyah, the Dyāhlā of Kumbheśvar have two *guthis*, one for the worship of Bhairava and Nāsaḥdyah on the full moon of Puṣ, the other a death *guthi*. There was another, for a collective annual performance of ancestor worship (*sorāh śrāddha*), which they had kept up for fifteen or twenty years, but it was discontinued in 1989.

Whereas the Dyāhlā are found wherever there are concentrations of Newars, both inside and outside the Valley, the Cyāmkhalah seem to be largely concentrated in Kathmandu city. I was told by the Dyāhlā of Poḍe Twāḥ, Kumbheśvar, that there are only eight households of Cyāmkhalah in Lalitpur but more than 200 in Kathmandu (N. Sharma's unpublished survey revealed ten Cyāmkhalah households in Lalitpur: see Fig. 9.2). Dyāhlā and Cyāmkhalah do not intermarry. The question of relative ranking proved not to be straightforward, however.

High castes invariably say that the Cyāmkhalah are lower, and they sometimes say that only the Cyāmkhalah will clean up faecal matter (though this seems not to be so in fact). The 1854 Law Code also ranked the Cyāmkhalah lower. In Panauti a Cyāmkhalah comes once a year from Bhaktapur to dispose of inauspicious offerings made by local Dyāhlā (Toffin 1984: 307–8 n. 22). Thus I fully expected the Dyāhlā of Lalitpur to cite their privilege of being god-guardians at Mother Goddess and some Bhairava temples as evidence of their superior status.<sup>31</sup> Their honorific name, Dyāhlā, derives from this function and means 'god-guardian';<sup>32</sup> one man in Kumbheśvar calls himself by the still more Sanskritic (and concealing) equivalent 'Pūjārī'. However, to my surprise on one occasion a respected elder Dyāhlā of Poḍe Twāḥ, Kumbheśvar, denied this and said that in the past each group refused the food of the other, though their work was the same. But, he continued, the Dyāhlā had to provide the public executioner (he was chosen by a *guthi* of Chetrapati and Sawal Bāhāḥ Dyāhlās in Kathmandu). Consequently the Ranas called the Dyāhlā *caṇḍāl* and would not allow them in their palaces; they employed exclusively Cyāmkhalah as sweepers. So the Cyāmkhalah appeared higher. The distinction between them goes back, the elder continued, to Sthiti Malla, who placed neither higher than the other.

However, on different occasions, other local Dyāhlā did assume that the Cyāmkhalah were lower than them and did associate the Cyāmkhalah with the acceptance of death-offerings. Even the Dyāhlā require someone unambiguously lower than themselves to accept such death-offerings: the *nhaynhūmā* (taken for high castes by Kāpālīs) and the forty-fifth day offerings (taken for high castes by the domestic priest). For the Dyāhlā these are taken by the Halahulu. In many modern caste lists the Halahulu appear as a separate caste.<sup>33</sup> But in fact he seems to be a solitary outcaste, whoever is willing to accept the offerings. In Lalitpur he is said to exist only in Bhaktapur and is invited from there; in Bhaktapur they are said only to exist in Kathmandu (Levy 1990: 85). Dyāhlās in Kumbheśvar say that the Halahulu is really a Cyāmkhalah.

In general, priestly services are required primarily at death. There are several Dyahḷā men who know how to direct a *śrāddha* service and one may invite whomsoever one wishes to do this. Up to a year after death it is essential to perform *śrāddha*; after that it is optional. The ritual at birth is done on the second day by the midwife. Girls need neither mock marriage nor confinement. Boys do go through an initiation, the tonsure (*busākhā*), which is referred to by Dyahḷā as *vartamān*, the same Nepali term used by other castes as an equivalent of the Newari *kaytā pūjā*. The boy's hair is cut by his maternal uncle, collected by his paternal aunt, and thrown in the Bagmati river. There is no need for nail-cutting.

According to Dyahḷā informants from Kumbheśvar, there is no particular marriage ritual. If a young man and woman get on, she moves in with him. She does not have to give betel nuts to be accepted. Few Dyahḷā have horoscopes, so there is no need to match them. It is forbidden, however, to marry someone known to be related on either side. Unlike Parbatiyā Untouchables (Höfer 1976: 350; Bouillier 1977: 102) Dyahḷā do not marry cross-cousins, nor is the ZS/DH expected to be a priest. Nor do they practise the levirate, as some Harijans in India do: as with other Newars, they say that one's elder brother's wife is 'like one's sister'.

Four days after a young woman has moved in to her new husband's home, her natal family come and fetch both husband and bride, take them home, and feast them. The young man owes nothing to his wife's parents; but if they die he must go and participate in the funeral procession. R. K. Vajracharya's informant (1989: 183) describes a more elaborate Dyahḷā wedding ritual involving mutual affinal feasting on the high-caste model, but this is perhaps a relatively rare and ideal practice. He mentions the interesting fact that the son-in-law is expected to carry the corpse of his dead parents-in-law in the funeral procession (ibid. 184).

An important recurring theme when other Newars discuss the Dyahḷā is their performance of essential but polluting work. In this connection Newars cite the following facts. They are sweepers of streets, courtyards, and lavatories (sweepers within large temples are usually the higher-status *Kāpālīs*). They beg at any time, and in particular come round collecting gifts of old clothes during an eclipse (*grahadān*). They collect discarded polluted food from other castes' feasts. When other castes perform ancestor worship and throw the ice-balls destined for the dead in the river, they catch them in a basket, dry them, and eat them. Their caste is associated with the task of executing criminals. Traditionally they collected faeces and sold them to farmers as fertilizer, and some still do so. These associations may be reinforced by the phonetic similarity of the ordinary non-honorific name of the Dyahḷā, *Pwaḥ*, and the word for dirty, *phohar*. A Dyahḷā man interviewed by Levy (1990: 385) saw the acceptance of dirty, polluted food as the most lowering and revolting Dyahḷā specialism, worse than dealing in faeces.

Overlapping these associations with dirt and pollution is another clean-caste stereotype: that the low castes, and particularly the Dyahḷā, lack 'rules' (*niyam*). To say that they lack *niyam* is to imply that, like animals, they have no obligations, live under no ritual restrictions, and have no morals. They are therefore without *dharma*, as noted in the quotation above from Levy. High castes sometimes remark that the Dyahḷā are becoming rich these days, because they have municipal jobs and salaries but do not need to spend money on expensive rituals. It is true that the Dyahḷā have fewer rituals than clean castes, and do those they do perform on a more modest scale, but the brief survey above should give the lie to the claim that they are 'without rules'. They have many of the same rules as other Newars.

The final strand in the identity of the Dyahḷā has to do with their connection with the Mother Goddesses, with cremation grounds, with the area outside the city, with ghosts, and with death (see Plate 6). Many authors have discussed the homology, imperfect but definitely there, between the social hierarchy of Hinduism and its divine hierarchy or pantheon. It has been noted above how the Kāpālī death specialist incarnates the dead person as ghost in the first seven or ten days after death. Dyahḷā incarnate ghosts in a more general and non-specific way. A Dyahḷā is essential at the Ghate Mugaḥ festival as celebrated in Kathmandu at Wangah (Indra Cok): to symbolize the expulsion of ghosts and demons he is abusively chased out of the city.<sup>34</sup> Someone who fears sudden death, from illness or an enemy, may give a large gift to a Dyahḷā in the hope of avoiding it. If the children of a clean-caste couple repeatedly die young, it was until recently a common custom to make a symbolic gift of the next newborn child to a Dyahḷā (or sometimes a Kāpālī); years later, at the time of their caste initiation, they would be 'bought back'. The idea was that if they were thought to be Dyahḷā, demons or ghosts would be less likely to attack them. As we have seen, Dyahḷās are also god-guardians at the Mother Goddesses' shrines, which are frightening places outside the city walls where ghosts, demons, and witches gather at night. The Dyahḷā are supposed to be fearless in cremation grounds, which are likewise infested with evil spirits. Each funeral procession has by tradition to pay a tax to the current god-guardian of the Mother Goddess associated with the cremation ground they are heading towards. The Dyahḷā sometimes mention in this context the story of King Hariścandra, who was forced to become a Caṇḍāla's servant on the cremation *ghāṭs* because he had had to give away his kingdom, wealth, and family. According to Hodgson's notes, the Dyahḷā even used to be in charge of cremating the body (Toffin 1987: 224).

This connection with death means that higher castes not only despise, but also to some extent fear the Dyahḷā. This is sometimes interpreted more positively in that the Dyahḷā are said to have great Tantric power, and a story is current of a Brāhmaṇ, Gayā Bājyā, who took a Dyahḷā as his *guru*.<sup>35</sup> Dyahḷās in Lalitpur do not themselves claim Tantric powers and in fact generally go to

the Khaḍgīs' priests (the Nāy Gubhāju) if they require exorcisms, minor curing, or amulets. They do, however, repeat a story that there were three brothers: the eldest became a Vajrācārya and had to take offerings at *śrāddha* rituals (ancestor worship); the middle one became a Kāpālī and had to live in a wayside shelter; the youngest became a Dyahḷā and had to accept the riceballs people throw in the Bagmati. Like many low-caste myths and stories throughout the subcontinent, this posits an original kinship between high caste and low, a kinship which denies the present status hierarchy, or reduces it to that of elder brother and younger brother.<sup>36</sup> In the present case, it is based (a) on connections with death ritual which all three castes have; and (b) on the fact all three of these castes observe a period of death impurity lasting seven days, whereas other castes' is ten or twelve days. Not surprisingly, this story is never heard from Śākya or Vajrācāryas; but Śreṣṭhas do sometimes tell versions of it to deflate the status aspirations of their Buddhist rivals.

Like other low castes, Dyahḷā rarely have agricultural land of their own. In addition to the meagre sources of income already considered, they keep pigs and ducks. In some cases they make bamboo baskets also. Ducks' eggs can be sold, and since they are required for ritual purposes by all Newars, they are a useful source of cash. The same applies to fish; Dyahḷā are fishermen, a profession no other caste will take up. Pigs, on the other hand, are considered unclean, so they are kept only for their own consumption. In some areas fishing is the major occupation of the Dyahḷā. In Panauti more than half of the Dyahḷā population migrates to Panchkal to fish, taking their ducks with them, from December to March.<sup>37</sup>

In the big cities by contrast, Dyahḷās today have a steady and secure income from their positions as sweepers in government offices and factories, as is shown in Table 9.5. One Dyahḷā man said simply, 'In the past life was hard (*muskil*); now we don't need to worry.' Most earn the minimum wage of 890 rupees a month and some hold two such sweeping jobs. No other caste has such a high proportion of salaried employees; the high proportion of women working in this way is even more remarkable. Being employed in this way means that Dyahḷā women may move around the city singly to a degree that is not acceptable for the women of other castes. As in Benares (Searle-Chatterjee 1981), the economic niche provided by low status has given sweepers in the city a secure income which is unchallenged by others, except for the occasional Kāpālī. Unlike the sweepers of Benares, however, they are not unionized and they lack the degree of pride and self-assertiveness described by Searle-Chatterjee. They have to fear the Khaḍgī, who are more numerous and very ready to resort to violence if their superiority is challenged.

Most Dyahḷā marriages are what the Dyahḷā, like other Nepalese, now call 'love' matches. The parents only intervene to arrange a marriage if a girl becomes pregnant. This being so, it is unlikely that there are internal grades as Moffatt discovered within the larger untouchable castes in south India, or any



TABLE 9.5. *Data on the employment of 64 Dyahlā men and 75 Dyahlā women, Poḍe Twāḥ, Kumbheśvar, Lalitpur (in percentages)*

	Men (N = 64)	Women (N = 75)
Sweeper	81.3	78.7
Single job	65.6	64
Two jobs	15.7	14.7
LTPNP	9.5	34.7
SWMRC	25	34.7
Retired	1.6	
Other	3	
None	4.7	12
Not known	9.4	9.3
	100	100

Notes: LTPNP = Lalitpur Nagar Panchayat (municipality).

SWMRC = Solid Waste Management and Resources Centre.

Source: Data collected by Ratna Lal Dyahlā.

TABLE 9.6. *Origin of wives in Poḍe Twāḥ, Kumbheśvar, Lalitpur (in percentages)*

	(N = 69)
Kumbheśvar	25
Other Lalitpur localities	9
Kathmandu	16
Bhaktapur	10
Kirtipur	7
Chitlang	13
Other <sup>a</sup>	13
Not known	7
	100

Note: Four married but divorced or separated women, who had returned to this, their natal locality, were not included.

<sup>a</sup> Includes Sankhu, Nala, Panauti, Khasti (Bauddha) (all two each), and Bhuijāsi (Buḍhā Nīlkaṇṭha) (one).

hypergamy between such grades as Searle-Chatterjee (1981: 27–8) reports for Uttar Pradesh, north India. The Dyahlā almost certainly experience higher rates of separation, divorce, and remarriage than other Newar castes. Certainly they have smaller households.<sup>38</sup> Since they have few assets there is little economic incentive to stay together and it seems to be normal for a young man and his wife to set up a separate household soon after marriage. None the less, virilocal residence is still strongly observed and patrilocal rights in god-guardian roles at Mother Goddess shrines are, we have seen, important. Wives are drawn from a wide variety of places, as shown in Table 9.6. This is almost as high a degree of city exogamy as has been noted above for Khaḍgīs; it reveals

a similar level of Dyāhlā city exogamy to that of Panauti (66% compared to 61%). But whereas this is the lowest level of settlement exogamy of any caste in Panauti, it is high compared to large castes in Lalitpur.

Today neither Dyāhlā nor Cyāmkhalah may eat beef. Only the possibility of eating carrion beef arises, since cow-slaughter is against the law in Nepal. Neither caste may go to collect dead cows, although they still do in Panauti (Toffin *et al.* 1991: 117). (They do go to collect dead chickens.) These polluting tasks are reserved for the Parbatīyā Sārki (as noted above). Yet it may be that before 1769 the Cyāmkhalah were indeed carrion-collectors and this has simply been forgotten.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Social change is occurring throughout Nepal, and nowhere as fast as in the Kathmandu–Lalitpur conurbation. So far there is no sign that Newar clean castes are willing to discard the exclusions to which they subject low castes.<sup>40</sup> An inter-caste marriage between clean castes causes problems, but frequently no longer leads the family to boycott the offender entirely. A marriage with a Khaḍgī is still a deep shame for all the family and involves the complete severing of ties (unions with Dyāhlā are simply unthinkable). In this situation it is hardly surprising that certain members of low castes, especially those belonging to small and low-profile groups such as the Carmakār, attempt to escape their ascribed Newar status altogether. They speak Nepali to their children, the women have begun to wear nose ornaments, and they attempt to pass in the new, supposedly egalitarian world of modern Kathmandu.

Within the Valley escape from low-caste identity was impossible in the past (indeed concealing it in the context of inter-caste sexual relations could lead to horrible punishments). Long-distance migration does not enable low-caste Newars to change their identity. Even where other Newars have tended to merge into a single bloc, or several blocs, the Khaḍgī have remained distinct and continue to practise as butchers (L. Caplan 1975: 25–6).

There is no sign yet of distinctive low-caste movements among the Newars, as found so often in India among low-caste groups (Lynch 1969; Mahar (ed.) 1972). Although caste no longer has the force of law in Nepal, there has been nothing like Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns to overcome prejudice. Nepal has no equivalent of the Indian Constitution of 1950, which supports positive discrimination, or of the different states' Temple Entry Acts of the 1930s and 1940s, forcing clean castes to admit Untouchables to their temples (Galanter 1972). Low castes in Nepal have until now remained very little politicized. Politicians have refrained from advocating positive discrimination, presumably from fear of antagonizing their clean-caste supporters, but also from fear of promoting divisiveness (Höfer 1979: 205–7).

There is, however, evidence of some culturally expressed rebellion. We have noted already that some educated Khadgīs give up pork. Such Khadgīs also have a definite preference for Theravāda Buddhism. Although there is no direct influence of the neo-Buddhist movement started by Ambedkar in India (there has been no attempt to lead all Khadgīs into the Buddhist fold *en masse*), the reasons for adopting Buddhism may be the same. Theravāda Buddhism is the main conduit into Nepal of Buddhist modernism, which stresses Buddhism's egalitarianism and makes of the Buddha a social reformer. Although apparently reluctant to do this in the past, the organization of Nepalese Theravāda monks has now admitted two young Khadgī men to the novitiate and they are training abroad in Theravāda Buddhist countries. As far as I know, however, the Theravāda movement has yet to extend its proselytization and ordination further down the social scale.

Although the evidence for this is only anecdotal and impressionistic, it is fair to say that in their general bearing and in the styles of life they are beginning to adopt, low castes express their rejection of the old disabilities. Khadgī young men are as fashionably dressed as any and are proudly assertive of their equal status. Dyaḥlā youths are not so pushy, but wearing spotless denim suits while driving a municipal tractor to collect garbage is a statement of at least sartorial equality. Dyaḥlā women now march fearlessly down the centre of the street, swinging their muck-laden baskets from the ends of their carrying pole, and forcing other pedestrians to stand aside, where once they would have had to creep timidly up the sides, letting higher castes by.

All the same, for the moment the barrier between the 'unclean' castes and the rest remains high. Parry (1979: 115) has criticized those who have stressed the impermeability of the Untouchability barrier. He discusses at length the attempts of the Koli caste to raise their status, something that was evidently acceptable under certain conditions to the castes above them. It seems to me, however, that the Kolis' position corresponded to the Newar castes of bloc IV, whom we have seen to be 'marginally untouchable' for some high castes of Bhaktapur. Although at one time considered untouchable, according to Parry, the Kolis had and have no lowering specialism, being 'cultivators' by caste. It is surely wrong to generalize from such a case to all low castes. There is evidence from elsewhere also (Rowe 1968) that castes near the boundary have often been successful in raising their status. But for the main untouchable castes such reform movements have been singularly ineffective in removing the barrier (e.g. Harper 1968). *For them* the barrier is indeed unbreachable.

Some crucial questions remain to be addressed on the position of Newar low castes in this 'traditional' and still active system, i.e. the social system of the Newars as it has operated in the last 200–300 years. Do Newar low castes constitute a culture apart—a distinct subculture, perhaps retaining customs dating back to a period before the repeated waves of Hindu influence from India? Do they represent a counter-culture, a quiet but persistent rebellion

against the dominant and oppressive values of clean-caste Newars? Or do the low castes share the values of high-caste Newars (as a Hocartian or Dumontian perspective might lead us to expect) and put them into practice to the best of their ability? Is it true of Newar castes, as Moffatt (1979: 304) asserts in the ringing phrase with which he concludes his book on low castes in Tamil Nadu, that 'those persons who are, in egalitarian terms, among the most oppressed members of Indian society are also among the truest believers in the system that so oppresses them'?

In spite of the paucity of data some provisional answers to these questions must be attempted, at least as far as the *Khaddḡī* and the *Dyahlā* are concerned. A clear distinction between the two groups must be made, since the place of each in Newar society is very different.

One idea—an old-fashioned one in terms of Western scholarship, but now adopted by some scheduled-caste political movements in India—is that low castes somehow represent a pre-Hindu substratum which has survived, though much attenuated, from thousands of years ago.<sup>41</sup> Such a claim is implicit in the terminology which classes the Untouchables of Tamil Nadu as *Ādi-Dravida*s ('the original Dravidians'). In the Newar case this theory lacks even superficial plausibility. Rather it is the middle-ranking Maharjan caste, if anyone, who might represent some kind of cultural substratum or survival (see Chs. 1 and 5 above for discussion of this hypothesis). Newar low castes' own myths, even (though weakly) those of the *Dyahlā*, make them immigrants from the Indian plains. Low castes have in Nepal served as *agents* of Hinduization; they are not the bearers of a culture that has survived from some postulated pre-Hindu stage. And surely this has in fact been so elsewhere in the subcontinent.

Far more defensible in this context is the position argued for in great detail by Kolenda (1982; see also 1990). The untouchable Chuhra caste of the western Uttar Pradesh village she studied in the 1950s preserves marriage practices which constitute a kind of Sanskritic *śūdra* model: Chuhra widows are inherited by their dead husband's younger brother and either become his wife or may be sold in marriage elsewhere. This practice is permitted even to high-caste Hindus in ancient law texts, and became unacceptable only in the medieval period. The Chuhra share with the dominant Rajputs a common regional kinship system and many values. It is the Rajputs who have innovated. In this perspective the Untouchables represent not a pre-Hindu, but an earlier Hindu practice. Such a position, however, can hardly be maintained for the *Dyahlā*.

Do the low castes preserve some kind of counter-culture in opposition to high-caste values? This idea also cannot really be upheld. The differences in their way of life—their style of clothes, their lack of access to clean-caste ritual specialists—are and were *imposed upon them*. Low castes were not allowed to Sanskritize on pain of punishment. Omitting the mock marriage ritual for young girls, or consuming pork, are not acts of rebellion against high-caste

values and are never perceived as such; they are customs permissible because the caste is so low. Young Khaḍgīs today deeply resent the high-caste values which put them low because of their birth alone; but this rarely leads them to a wholesale rejection of caste as such. They continue to keep the Dyahḷā at arm's length, and they discard, rather than re-evaluate, the practices that identify them as low in the eyes of higher castes.

Is it not true, none the less, that low castes have a recognizable subculture distinct from that of clean-caste Newars? Here one must note what Toffin, who has done more research on Newars than anyone else, writes about the Dyahḷā:

They have developed a very specific 'subculture', the principal elements of which are as follows: a markedly distinct type of house, less refined than the traditional Newar home; smaller families than those of other castes; the choice of certain divinities, such as Lakṣmī and Nāsadya, who receive the bulk of their devotion. (Toffin 1984: 586)

Newars themselves would add that the Dyahḷā have their own way of speaking Newari. But this is suspect since Newars love to discuss dialectal nuances and every settlement and every caste is said to be different on this score.

One should note first that Toffin makes this claim for the Dyahḷā and not for the Khaḍgī. There can be little doubt that the Khaḍgī share the values of other castes and no more have a different subculture than any other Newar caste. (They have of course their own distinctive traditions, but so does every other caste.)

Are the Dyahḷās' ways of doing things sufficiently different to constitute a subculture? The Dyahḷā, we have seen, share the hierarchical values of the rest of society in so far as they require someone lower than themselves to take death-offerings. The fact that they use the mother's brother as a barber is not a question of different values, but is a kin-substitution—code-switching in Moffatt's terms—which other low castes practise also. Indeed it is a common substitution among Hindus elsewhere, for example, in the hills of Nepal, even among Brāhmaṇs. When I asked about the priest who directs *śrāddha* rituals for them, a Dyahḷā man said that he reads 'just like a Gubhāju [Vajracārya]'—in other words, they aspire to have the same rituals as other castes. Like other Newars, they have a death *guthi*. Like many other Newar castes, they have rights to be god-guardians for a specific class of divinities. They share a high evaluation of seniority within the kin group, and also express this ritually in the division and distribution of a sacrificed animal's head or body in order of seniority (Levy 1990: 330).

Yet Dyahḷā do have few arranged marriages, do eschew the joint family, and do have (at least traditionally) much smaller and somewhat differently organized houses. They are an essential part of the overall hierarchy, but that hierarchy requires them to be set apart. Over the relationship between the Cyāmkhalah and the Dyahḷā there remains a tantalizing ethnographic question-mark. But that aside, there is no evidence available of status grades within the

Dyaḥlā caste such as Moffatt found in south India. They have not had the economic resources to institutionalize hierarchy internally in any meaningful way.

In fact in a recent study of Paraiyars in Tamil Nadu Deliège (1988) suggests that Moffatt's village was rather unusual: Moffatt may have exaggerated the presence of hierarchy in actual practice as opposed to in ideal models recounted to outsiders.<sup>42</sup> According to Deliège, Paraiyars certainly interact with other low castes in a hierarchical manner and lack any ideology of egalitarianism, but none the less their *intra*-caste relationships are strongly egalitarian. In a more recent article (1992), Deliège has argued still more forcefully that Moffatt overstated his case and that his village was unusual. Untouchables do not in fact replicate in every way whenever they are excluded by higher castes. One reason they do not and cannot do so is that they are denied access to economic resources and power (and not just to status), and this is essential to their position. Even when Untouchables do replicate what higher castes do, it does not follow that they are in entire consensus with the system; although they rarely evolve an oppositional ideology they do usually see their position as one they have been forced into.

In a similar way, among the Newars the Dyaḥlās' commitment to hierarchical values is not so serious and unambiguous as to warrant the claim that they are 'among the truest believers' in the caste system. The Dyaḥlā do not replicate every specialism from which the high castes exclude them; and only death-offerings are replicated in a caste-like manner. Women have a very different status among them, a status that is acknowledged ritually. For example, in Bhaktapur (Levy 1990: 725 n. 42) and Kirtipur, and probably elsewhere also, after a Dyaḥlā child is born the head of a sacrificed pig is ritually divided according to seniority *among the women only*, which never happens among other castes.

In sum, then, Moffatt's position—'They do not possess a separate subculture . . . Untouchables possess and act upon a thickly textured culture whose fundamental definition and values are identical to those of more global Indian village culture'—may be accepted as correct for the Khaḍgī. The fact that it is particularly among them that different contexts for the use of barbering and toe-nail-cutting specialists become apparent, as discussed above, can be cited in support of Moffatt's position, even though it is not a result he anticipated. That is to say, the shared underlying ritual logic—only implicit in high-caste practices—is evident and explicitly displayed in Khaḍgī customs (see above, Fig. 9.1). The Khaḍgī therefore surely share fully in high-caste values.

The study of low-caste specialists does not merely elicit distinctions between types of barbering. It also brings out the connection between priesthood and kinship. In an article demonstrating the proliferation of Newar priests, especially those dealing with death, Toffin contrasts the Newars with the Parbatīyās, among whom, on occasion, a wife-taker (ZS or DH) may even take

on the role of the Brāhmaṇ domestic priest; and Toffin concludes, 'it seems that in Newar society the sacerdotal function is quite separate from kinship' (Toffin 1987: 231). While the basic contrast is quite valid—the Newars certainly do have many more priestly specialists than the Parbatiyās, and they make use of them wherever possible—the data presented here on both high and low Newar castes, and summarized in Table 9.2 above, show clearly that among the Newars also there is ultimately the same connection between categories of kin and types of priest.

We have seen, then, that as far as the Khaḍgī, the 'dominants' among the low castes, are concerned, Moffatt's consensus theory holds water. The Khaḍgī, however, are not technically untouchable but only 'water-unacceptable'. With the qualifications noted and subject to further research, one may support Toffin's conclusion that the Dyaḥlā *do* have a distinct subculture. Although an essential part of the traditional Newar hierarchy, the Dyaḥlā are not fully integrated within it, and in fact it looks as if the traditional hierarchy *requires* them, through the restrictions it places upon them, not to share in the culture of higher castes. This divergence is not systematic or ideologically focused and cannot be called a 'counter-culture'.

Dumont has been criticized for his assertion that caste ideology is necessarily blind about power and his concomitant claim that the position of the Hindu king is a secular one. There are indeed many aspects of the symbolization of power that Dumont simply ignored (see e.g. Gupta and Gombrich 1986, Dirks 1987, Toffin 1993a). He has also been criticized for failing to see that the position of the Brāhmaṇ is highly problematic (see Ch. 10 below). A related criticism, though one less frequently made, is that Dumont underplayed the way caste ideology is necessarily blind about Untouchability: the position of Untouchables is also necessarily paradoxical or problematic. The caste system requires Untouchables to be integrated as an essential defining feature and ritual role, the essence of which is that they must be different, excluded, and powerless.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

1. Most of the data presented here were collected during three brief trips to Nepal in 1989, 1991, and 1992, all funded by the British Academy. I would especially like to thank Uttam Sagar Shrestha for collecting data on Kirtipur. Thanks also to N. J. Allen, V. Bouillier, J. Davis, L. Iltis, D. P. Martinez, B. Owens, A. Russell, and A. Sanderson for comments on earlier drafts.
2. For a similar discussion of the difficulties of fieldwork among Untouchables, see Searle-Chatterjee (1981: ch. 2). For other works on Indian Untouchables, social change, and political responses, written from a variety of different approaches, see Cohn (1987: chs. 11–14), Lynch (1969), Mahar (ed.) (1972), Freeman (1979), and Khare (1984).
3. Budhathoki (1982) has published part of another chronicle relating to Sthiti Malla's

regulations. It is so close to the Bhāṣā Vaṃśāvalī that it can be used to check passages where the latter is obscure.

4. The text here is very compressed, containing the phrase *din dinmā* (every day), which I cannot construe in this context. I have translated following the cognate chronicle of Budhathoki (1982: 15).
5. There were 4 *dām* to 1 *paisā*, and 4 *paisā* to 1 *annā*. Between 1769 and the 1860s the number of *paisā* to the rupee varied between 52 and 80, partly depending on which rupee was being referred to, partly depending on the relative prices of silver and copper (M. C. Regmi 1984: 223–4).
6. This is what the Bhāṣā Vaṃśāvalī text seems to mean. It might be better to follow the clearer text of Budhathoki (1982: 16), which states that each player receives 3 rupees for a *satī* and 3 *dām* on ordinary occasions.
7. Budhathoki (1982: 16): 1 rupee *or* 1 *paisā*.
8. Budhathoki (1982: 17): 8 *paisā*.
9. Toffin (1984: 231) puts the Rajaka above the Vādyakār. R. K. Vajracharya (1989) lists the low castes in the following order: Carmakār, Khaḍgī, Rajaka, Kāpālī, Dyahḷā.
10. Rosser (1966: 86) estimated their population at 1,050 households, twice the size of Dyahḷā or Kāpālī castes. My impression is that, if anything, this is an underestimate of the Khaḍgī caste's relative size.
11. Unpublished data from Quigley's (1981) survey of the 30 Khaḍgī households in Dhulikhel show this clearly: 5 households were involved in brick-making; 18 in other forms of labouring, usually agricultural; 8 households practised butchering and/or sold meat, with a further 5 occasionally buying and selling animals; there was one teacher and one household which sold vegetables.
12. For the technical details of this music, see Wegner's excellent study (1988).
13. See R. P. Pradhan (1986: 100–1), R. K. Vajracharya (1989), and R. Levy (1990: 663). In some cases the MB also symbolically touches the ears of the boy, before they are pierced.
14. I have not been able to establish whether the Śuddhakār/Katāḥ are a caste sub-group intermarrying with the Taṇḍukār or a separate caste of similar status. R. K. Vajracharya (1989: 185) gives their colloquial name as 'Bhamwah' and their honorific title as 'Nābhichedakār' ('navel-cutter').
15. See Nepali (1965: 176), B. C. Sharma (1968: 3a), Hasrat (1970: 53). The account in Wright's chronicle (folio 102<sup>r</sup>) says only that he would be defecating while the sun was rising, although in Wright's translation this is decorously left unmentioned (Wright 1972: 176). In another version the man is facing east (Levy 1990: 236). The Bhāṣā Vaṃśāvalī's version says that the man was a Jyāpu, i.e. a Maharjan (Lamshal 1966: 31), as does the Rājbhogmālā chronicle (1969 part 3: 19).
16. This is a Hindi loan, ultimately from Arabic (Turner 1980: s.v.). A folk etymology derives 'Śāhī' from 'Kasār' by subtracting the initial 'ka'.
17. Data from the survey mentioned in n. 11 above.
18. For east Nepal, see N. J. Allen (1976: 525). For India, see Parry (1979: 326 n. 12), Mayer (1966: s.v. Gosain, Nath, Bairagi), and the old gazetteers. On the Kāpālīkas, see Lorenzen (1972) and Sanderson (1988). A Kāpālī from Konti gave the following folk etymology: the name Jogi was acquired at a time when every Kāpālī had a permanent sacrificial fire (*jogi* < *yajña*) in his home.



19. For this myth, see Unbescheid (1980: 131–7). Unbescheid also records another, shorter story which is, I would guess, older. This records how Śiva cut off Brahmā's fifth head and the Yoginīs revived him by leaving his clothes at a *chmāsā* stone for Gorakhnāth to take away and by organizing a feast for him on the seventh day. The myth is evidently a charter for the Kāpālīs' taking of the dead person's clothes and *nhaynhūmā* offerings (ibid. 139–40; cf. Bouillier 1993: 99).
20. According to Unbescheid (1980: 141), the ritual performed is related to, and is believed by Kāpālīs to be related to, the Kānpaṭās' *cakrapūjā*. Brāhmaṇs and some Śreṣṭhas give these offerings on the fifth day (Levy 1990: 729 n. 36).
21. According to Asha Kaji Vajracharya there was a dispute in Rana times when the Dyaḥlā claimed they had the right to the dead person's clothes thrown at the *chmāsā*. It was decided by the authorities in favour of the Kāpālī on the grounds that 'they were the Buddhists' Bhāḥ [Karamjit]'. In Panauti it is indeed the Dyaḥlā who take these clothes (Toffin *et al.* 1991: 117).
22. Bouillier (1993: 77 n. 5, 89). According to Toffin (1984: 230), Kāpālīs sometimes make use of Vajrācārya priests, but this seems unlikely. They refer to their own priest as a 'Gubhāju' and their barber as a 'Nau', which is probably the source of the confusion.
23. See Bouillier (1993: 89–90) for a brief description.
24. Hasrat (1970: 65–6). According to another version it was Pratāp Malla who raised them from Untouchable status (Nepali 1965: 175).
25. Thus Hamilton (1971 [1819]: 37) listed the lowest Newar caste as the 'Chamkal, who are dressers of leather and shoemakers'.
26. Nepali (1965: 186). See Wegner (198: 27–50) for text and photographs explaining the construction of the *nāykhī* drum.
27. Manandhar's dictionary (1986: 115*b*) describes the Dwā as 'a sub-caste of Kusles'.
28. So at any rate R. K. Vajracharya was told (1989: 181); cf. D. R. Regmi (1965: i. 704).
29. For the sites of the eight, see Gutschow (1982: 163). The three in the west are stones near the river and are worshipped only when the eight are visited as a set.
30. In Kirtipur it was claimed that any Dyaḥlā man with a non-Dyaḥlā wife, even one of a higher caste, would be excluded from serving as god-guardian.
31. A Dyaḥlā informant in Kirtipur made precisely this claim to Uttam Sagar Shrestha and he identified the Cyāmkhalah as recipients of Dyaḥlās' death-offerings.
32. Levy's informants in Bhaktapur gave a folk etymology: from 'god' (*dyah*) plus 'meat' (*lā*), because they eat the meat offered to the Mother Goddesses (Levy 1990: 729 n. 30).
33. e.g. Toffin (1984: 231), Levy (1990: 79). Rosser (1966: 86) even estimated that there were fifty Halahulu households, but I think that this is almost certainly a mistake. The source of the idea that the Halahulu constitute a separate caste is possibly D. R. Regmi (1965: i. 677). Levy's list (previously published by Gutschow and Kölver 1975: 57) shows only a single household in Bhaktapur.
34. See G. S. Nepali (1965: 378). But according to R. P. Pradhan (1986: 360–74), who provides the ethnographically fullest and most sophisticated account of the festival, it is in fact supposed to be a Halahulu who is the scapegoat. The distinction is academic for most Newars. The role of a Dyaḥlā/Halahulu in Ghate Mugaḥ is not found in Bhaktapur (Levy 1990: 747 n. 26) or Lalitpur.

35. Hemraj Sakya showed me a colophon he had copied out dated NS 709 (1589), stating that the text had been copied by Gayā Juju of Swanimha, as proof that Gayā Bājyā was a historic personage. For an oral account of a Dyahlā's Tantric powers, see R. P. Pradhan (1986: 332–4).
36. See Delière (1993) for a discussion of such myths.
37. See Toffin (1984: 388–9), where fishing techniques are also described.
38. Toffin (1984: 396) found an average household size of 4.3 in Panauti, compared to 6.9 for Khaḍgīs, 6.2 for Chathariyās, and 7.1 for Vajrācāryas.
39. See above, the discussion under the heading of Carmakār.
40. A survey of 69 villages in rural Gujarat, India, carried out in the early 1970s, found that while Untouchables were rarely treated differently in schools or on buses, in most villages they were still subjected to traditional exclusions with regard to temple entry, house entry, the use of water facilities, and the services of the Barber and Potter (Desai 1976: 258).
41. Fürer-Haimendorf discusses this theory and points out numerous problems with it. He suggests that 'everything points to an urban origin of untouchability . . . Were the untouchables really the descendants of a conquered, aboriginal population, certainly their "impurity" and low social status would be shared by those aboriginals least assimilated to Hindu civilization. But the contrary is true . . . ' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1950: viii–ix).
42. However, a recent paper by Mosse (1994), describing a village in Ramnad, southern Tamil Nadu, suggests, against Delière, that where Harijans are present in sufficient numbers and with sufficient resources they do indeed replicate high-caste patterns of caste service, as Moffatt predicted. Unlike Moffatt, Mosse interprets this as a strategy of protest and upward mobility, rather than as an expression of consensus with the timeless values of village India.
43. Fuller (1992: 139) has come to a very similar conclusion on the basis of a comparison of village festivals in south India: 'Harijans are included precisely so that they can be portrayed as excluded, and the ambiguity of their role is intrinsic to the ritualization of village unity.'

## Conclusion: Caste Organization and the Ancient City

*Declan Quigley*

In his introduction Gellner suggests that Newar society provides a kind of paradigm for the study of Hindu South Asia and that the Kathmandu Valley exhibits one of the clearest expressions of the basic principles of caste. There is no good *a priori* reason why this should not be so. Nor is there any good reason for making the association which is often made between caste orthodoxy and India. Where should one choose in India as the locus of this orthodoxy? Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Hinduism is that it does not have a Rome or a Mecca.

In this chapter I will argue strongly in support of Gellner's claim although it must be said that a superficial acquaintance with the Kathmandu Valley suggests otherwise. The predominant sociological picture of Hinduism and of caste has been one of rural villages. In the Kathmandu Valley, however, we find an essentially urban society and one which has been urban for centuries. What is more, the pre-eminent theorist of caste, Louis Dumont, has suggested that Newars do not really exhibit caste at all, only status groups.<sup>1</sup> How then can it be claimed that Newar towns and cities illuminate the structure of Hindu social organization more generally?

It is already over thirty years since David Pocock suggested that the division between urban sociology and rural sociology in the study of South Asia is misplaced. Pocock's (1960) article, 'Sociologies: Urban and Rural', appeared in an early number of the journal *Contributions to Indian Sociology* which he then jointly edited with Dumont. There is a certain irony in this because no one has done more than Dumont to further the idea that to understand India and Hinduism is to understand village India and village Hinduism, while at the same time underplaying the importance of territory altogether.

Perhaps the central idea of Pocock's article is that the city stands for completeness—it represents or encapsulates the cosmos. More particularly, the city represents the fullest possible expression of moral values and social order. And more particularly still, Pocock asserts that the city, at the political level, is the centre of the king, whose prime duty 'was the maintenance of caste order'

(Pocock 1960: 66). Both ideally and in reality, the city is the centre of caste: 'the city expressed the fullest possible development of the caste system at any given time . . . [and] in the past provided the ground for maximum caste activity' (ibid. 67).<sup>2</sup>

My only quibble with Pocock's picture concerns his use of the past tense. The sociology of Newar settlements demonstrates that there is still today, as Pocock claimed, a clear continuity between the social structure of the city and the village in traditional South Asia. The cities of the Kathmandu Valley are far from being unique. In local terms, in comparison with other settlements in Nepal, they are perhaps a little peculiar, but only because they compress what is in other places more often dispersed or fragmented. The sociology of the Kathmandu Valley also shows unambiguously that there is a clear continuity between India and Nepal which anthropologists specializing on India can no longer afford to ignore. It is hardly surprising that there should be such a continuity. After all, the nation-state of India is a very recent creation and it would be odd if we were to restrict our search for the principles of caste to this modern formation.

Systematic fieldwork did not begin in Nepal until the 1950s and the arrival of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf and his students from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956; Rosser 1966). During more than thirty years of detailed historical and anthropological studies, there has been considerable debate on many issues, some of which is summarized in Chapter 1. While some questions continue to be disputed, there has been remarkable consensus on others. Here I will try to highlight both the areas of agreement and disagreement and relate these to wider theoretical discussions on the nature of caste.

Among the aspects of Newar society on which everyone is more or less agreed are the following:

- Newars are the product of groups of different origin being absorbed into the society of the Kathmandu Valley at various periods in history.
- In terms of both culture and social structure, however, Newars are quite distinct from their neighbours, including the Nepali-speaking Brāhmaṇ-Chetris who moved into the Kathmandu Valley as a result of the Gorkhālī conquest of the Newar kingdoms in 1769.
- Newar society is complex and quintessentially urban in character in a manner to be discussed below. This is most evident from the spectacular royal cities of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur (Patan) but the urban architectural style of high, brick-built houses, tightly packed together along narrow streets, is replicated in even the smallest Newar settlements.
- What is particularly impressive about Newar urbanism is that a majority of the population are peasants; the rich soil of the Valley traditionally ensured that a large population could be sustained from local resources.

- Trade also plays a vital role in the Newar economy, traditionally because the Valley lay along an ancient trade route between India and Tibet, more recently because Kathmandu, as the capital city and centre of development aid, has spawned new markets for imported goods. Trade has also been primarily responsible for drawing Newars out of the Kathmandu Valley to establish settlements elsewhere.
- Newar communities always exhibit a pronounced territorial introversion—settlements are protected from the dangerous outside by a ring of deities and in the past frequently by defensive walls.<sup>3</sup>
- This introversion is manifested in local caste divisions which make clear everyone's identity to everyone else and also mark out members of the community from outsiders who do not belong; Buddhist Newars no less than Hindu Newars are organized along caste lines.
- Caste divisions are underscored, as are all aspects of Newar social life, by pervasive ritual. While certain rituals bring together all the inhabitants of a particular settlement, many others are primarily orientated to an individual or a particular kinship group—a household, for example, or a group of affines, or perhaps a lineage.
- In every Newar community there is a system of socio-religious associations called *guthis*: the two most important of these are the *digu dyah guthi* (effectively the lineage as a ritual unit) and the *sī guthi* (an association of households which is responsible for overseeing death rituals).

Where there has been dispute among students of Newar society, it has tended to focus on the following issues:

- The number of different types of Newar settlement that may be said to exist (variously estimated between two and six), and whether or not there is any such thing as a 'typical' settlement.
- Whether or not Newar society can be said to have a 'tribal substratum'—i.e. a type of social organization which pre-dates, and is structurally different from, caste organization but exists alongside it.
- Whether or not the caste organization of the Newars is similar to caste organization as it is found in India.
- Whether or not there is a substantial degree of mobility between Newar castes, particularly from Maharjan (Jyāpu), who are mainly peasants, to Śreṣṭha, who may be peasants or rich landowners, petty shopkeepers or wealthy merchants, government servants or professionals.

It can be seen that the areas of agreement are relatively straightforward empirical matters while the areas of disagreement are generally not. The latter either concern questions on which it is difficult to make definitive empirical observations (mobility, for example, is often concealed), or they concern more theoretical interpretations which transcend local issues (particularly the question of how caste is structured in India).

Ultimately, I believe, the underlying disputes about the nature of Newar society boil down to a single question: is there a basic model of what Newar settlements look like? All authors, I would argue, have implied that there is—that there is some quality of ‘Newariness’ which is recognizable in all Newar settlements, great or small. The question of whether there is an underlying model of Newar settlements is not the same as the question—is there a *typical* Newar settlement? The implication is rather that all settlements are variations on a theme and therefore none is more typical than any other. But what is this underlying theme? What is ‘Newariness’?

One dimension of Newariness is illustrated in the unanimous portrayal of their settlements as urban: ‘The Newars are a community of urban disposition and whether they live in the towns or in the villages, their settlements always reveal an urban character’ (Nepali 1965: 53); ‘the outstanding feature of the civilization of the Nepal Valley . . . is its strictly urban character’ (Fürrer-Haimendorf 1966: 12); ‘a society such as that of the Newars, which is essentially urban’ (Macdonald and Vergati Stahl 1979: 66). Even the smallest settlements always exhibit intense social interaction and have a strong urban feel which is mirrored in the architecture. The style of life is captured particularly well in the following appraisal from the much respected French Sanskritist Sylvain Lévi:

The dominant feature of the Newar character is the taste for society. The Newar never stays alone; he likes to live, a little like the Parisian, in houses which are several storeys high and bursting with inhabitants . . . (Lévi 1905: i. 248)

But Lévi’s Parisian parallel should be treated cautiously. It should be remembered that one is speaking here of pre-industrial, rather than modern, urbanism.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I will adopt the definition of urbanism given by the social geographer Paul Wheatley:

*Urbanism* will be used to denote that particular set of functionally integrated institutions which were first devised some five thousand years ago to mediate the transformation of relatively egalitarian, ascriptive, kin-oriented groups into socially stratified, politically organized, territorially based societies . . . (Wheatley 1967: 27 n. 1)

As Wheatley acknowledges, his characterization of ancient urbanism owes more to Fustel de Coulanges’s (1864) work *La Cité antique* (*The Ancient City*) than to Weber’s *The City* (1958b [1921]). Where Weber characterizes the city as fortress and market, Fustel insists that the ancient city is first and foremost a symbolic and ritual unit. Taking up this theme, Wheatley argues that the centrality of symbolism was a general feature of early cities. It was not restricted to any particular geographical or cultural area:

Whenever, in any of the seven regions of primary urban generation, we trace back the characteristic urban form to its beginnings we arrive not at a settlement that is dominated by commercial relations, a primordial market, or at one that is focused on a citadel, an archetypical fortress, but rather at a ceremonial complex . . . The predomi-

nantly religious focus to the schedule of social activities associated with them leaves no room to doubt that we are dealing primarily with centers of ritual and ceremonial. Naturally this does not imply that the ceremonial centers did not exercise secular functions as well, but rather that these were subsumed into an all-pervading religious context . . . Operationally [these centers] were instruments for the creation of political, social, economic, and sacred space, at the same time as they were symbols of cosmic, social, and moral order. (Wheatley 1971: 225 f., quoted in Levy 1990: 19)

This passage from Paul Wheatley's comparative study of the Chinese city is part of a long piece quoted in approval by Robert Levy in his book *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*, to which I will now turn. *Mesocosm* is an extraordinarily rich account of religion and symbolism in the city of Bhaktapur, some ten miles to the east of Kathmandu. Until the late eighteenth century, Bhaktapur was the centre of a small, but very densely populated, kingdom and there is widespread agreement, among scholars and local inhabitants alike, that it is still today the most complete and thriving example of a traditional Newar community. By 'mesocosm', Levy wants to indicate that the city is an integrated symbolic structure—'an organized meaningful world intermediate to the microcosmic worlds of individuals and the culturally conceived macrocosm, the universe, at whose center the city lies' (Levy 1990: 2).

Levy's central project is to contrast the Newar city (and, more generally, high civilization of the agrarian age) with both the Tahitian villages of his first fieldwork and the modern urban communities which we most readily associate with the word 'city':

there is a kind of continent in the Great Divide [between primitive and scientific], which has its own distinctive typological features, exemplifies its own distinctive and important principles in relation to both sociocultural organization and to thought . . . (Ibid. 25)

These distinctive features, Levy claims, tend to be blurred or lost in the classical oppositions of simple and complex society. But they are captured in paradigmatic form in the traditional Newar cities, and Bhaktapur, he argues, provides as good an illustration of the paradigm as one might hope to find. Bhaktapur is neither like the relatively undifferentiated simplicity of Tahiti nor the enormous infrastructural complexity of industrial urbanism.<sup>5</sup> Its organization, like that of all Newar settlements, is exceedingly complex but its complexity is largely a result of symbolic elaboration. The astonishing degree of social and cultural order which is maintained is primarily generated through symbolism and ritual rather than through the kinds of economic and political institutions which make modern cities possible.

Levy argues that the essence of Bhaktapur's social organization can be captured in two ideas: it is both an 'archaic city' and a 'Hindu climax community'. By the latter, he means that in the royal Newar cities Hinduism achieves its

most complete form, the expression of what it is really all about. As for the concept of 'archaic city', Levy's main point is to press a generalist claim. Bhaktapur is not simply representative of Newar urbanism or even of Hindu urbanism:

Bhaktapur is not an ancient city in terms of historical continuity, but its organization reflects many of the same principles that have been ascribed to otherwise differing ancient cities as members of a certain type of urban community. As a member in some respects of such a class it may well suggest, *mutatis mutandis*, something of what they might have been, and may be thought of as an archaic city. (Ibid. 19)

As with the 'ancient city' of Fustel de Coulanges which is the source of his inspiration, the central idea in Levy's 'archaic city' is that social organization is constructed, Chinese-box style, in a series of ever more inclusive levels. On the one hand, each level has its own symbolic (religious) boundaries which guarantee its integrity and independence *vis-à-vis* other like levels. On the other hand, like units combine through symbolism and ritual to produce units of a different order. Thus in Bhaktapur (as in all Newar settlements):

Households with their own deities and religious practices are joined in patrilineal extended families with *their* own deities and practices. Patrilineal groups are in turn joined in wider inclusive units called *thars* whose members have a common surname. The *thars* are in turn organized into what we will call 'macrostatus levels'. (Ibid. 69)

What Levy calls 'macrostatus levels', most other commentators would call castes. This is a point I will return to shortly.

Levy is somewhat ambivalent about the nature of the symbolic structures he describes. His book was written with the collaboration of Kedar Rāj Rājopādhyāya, the chief priest of Bhaktapur's Taleju temple, and most of the information is drawn from Newar Brāhmaṇ priests, from the top as they (and Levy) see it. Levy suggests that what they portray is an ideal, normative order rather than an empirically accurate picture. On the other hand, he argues that the priests' conception of things is 'not just the wishful ideological thinking and propaganda of precarious elites but a powerful force that in itself helps to create order' (ibid. 9). Throughout his account it is often unclear when the distinction between actual order and the normative order of priests (particularly the king's priest) is collapsed and when it is preserved. He goes on to say that where popular interpretations diverge from those of the priestly élite they are simply mistaken unless they are attempts to demystify the system; but this would seem to imply that the conception of the social order given by these priests is, after all, an empirically accurate representation. This is obviously an important question to resolve.

Levy takes up a passing reference from Dumont (1980: 156) that the compartmentalization of little Hindu kingdoms 'must have been at its height at periods of instability and political disintegration' (ibid. 28). But there is an



implicit argument in his characterization of compartmentalized Newar settlements that such instability must have been more or less endemic in the Kathmandu Valley before the Gorkhālī conquest (in 1769) and the subsequent absorption of the Newar homeland into the unified state of Nepal. While Levy limits his argument to Bhaktapur, there is, I think, a strong case to be made that endemic political instability is one of the characteristic features of pre-modern Hindu society everywhere. Baechler (1988) has forcefully argued that this is *the* characteristic feature of South Asian caste systems.

Whether this more general claim is justified or not, there seems little doubt that the political instability of the wider world was one of the main factors encouraging Newar communities to turn in on themselves to produce the kind of mini-kingdoms which Bhaktapur exemplifies—royal cities with a territorially limited agricultural hinterland. The relative stability of the last two centuries has not, however, changed this pattern. If anything, introversion almost certainly became more intensified with the Gorkhālī conquest and the subsequent regulation of castes and ethnic groups by the Rana regime as first witnessed in the Muluki Ain (Legal Code) of 1854.<sup>6</sup> This historical setting apart of Newars (and other groups) has proved to be an enduring impediment in the political unification of Nepal.

But why should caste be the main principle of social organization in the traditional Newar cities? On Levy's argument, this is ordained from above, by the Brāhman priests, and the rest of the society goes along with it. Why they should go along with it is not, however, entirely clear. The answer to this puzzle is crucial because the pattern which Levy articulates for Bhaktapur has been reported not only in every other Newar settlement but in caste-organized communities throughout the subcontinent:

These [macrostatus or caste] levels determine or are expressed by patterns of marriage, eating, and association and, for many groups, places of residence . . . and are associated, in classic South Asian ways, with theories and symbols of purity and pollution. (Ibid. 73)

The expression 'in classic South Asian ways' needs to be examined carefully. The use of such expressions has always been a weakness in the academic treatment of caste in South Asia. It is somehow taken as axiomatic that Hindus have a peculiar ('classic') way of doing things which is associated with irreducible notions of purity and pollution. It is Dumont's analysis of caste which immediately comes to mind in this regard though his theory is essentially an extremely rigorous treatment of the presuppositions which underlie the work of a great many other scholars. While Levy is critical of Dumont's exegesis of the alleged purity–pollution syndrome, and particularly of his treatment of the relation between priest and king, his alternative picture of the caste order is also deeply problematic. To see why, we first need to look briefly at theories of caste.

There are few concepts in general anthropological usage which cause as much confusion as the word 'caste'. On the one hand there is a widespread feeling that the general principles are understood and we do not need to waste too much more time talking about them. So, for example, we 'know' that 'the caste system' is tied up with concepts of purity and pollution such that the Brāhman̄s are the 'highest' caste because they are the most pure, while the Untouchables are the 'lowest' caste because they are the most defiled. We also 'know' that caste is somehow connected with occupation and that one is born into the caste of one's parents with little possibility of mobility up or down.

In fact, as I have indicated by the use of inverted commas, all of these beliefs are rather problematic. One indication of this is that, in spite of the apparent simplicity of these various propositions about caste, over the years several conflicting theories have been invoked to account for them. These theories literally range from the sublime (caste ideology is fundamentally about renunciation) to the base (caste is about maintaining inequalities produced in the first place through slaughter and rapine).

There is, or was, a race theory of caste, an occupational theory of caste, a theory which stresses the basic dualism of Hindu thought, another which insists on a fundamental monism, a theory which says that inequality is generated by various transactions, and one which says that the transactions are an expression of that inequality which logically, therefore, must come first. There is a theory which says that caste is a non-competitive, harmonious system where everyone knows their place, and a contrary theory which says that caste is fundamentally exploitative and those who suffer under it use whatever device is available to them to improve their lot. There is also a theory which says that castes do not really exist as substantial, bounded units and that one should focus on the structural logic of the total system rather than on any essential nature of the units which make up the system.

As Gellner has stated in the Introduction, another argument has been made by Inden and others to the effect that caste and other 'essentializing' Western concepts should be downplayed in the anthropological vocabulary because of their implicit (or explicit) 'Orientalism'. The obsessive portrayal of India as bound by caste and ritual, it is argued, has been an intellectual extension of the West's imperialist history. By making Indians appear as slaves of manifestly foolish and iniquitous institutions, ideological subjugation attempts to finish off what political subjugation failed to do.

When generalized in the manner of Said (1978, 1993), the anti-Orientalist argument is not only powerful; it effectively inhibits Western anthropologists from saying anything about anyone for fear of representing them as 'other' and therefore inferior. While there is no doubt that the concept of caste is particularly prone to being hijacked by essentialists, often unwittingly, this does not mean that the concept can be done away with altogether. Nor does it mean that one cannot make certain unambiguous claims about caste organization. It is

clear, for example, that caste organization is a product of the fertile plains, not of mountain, forest, or desert. It is also apparent to anyone who studies the evidence that caste cannot *in general* be explained in terms of race or occupation. There are *some* correlations with both of these, which is why certain people have constructed theories in terms of them in the first place, but there are also so many exceptions that some other kind of explanation must be sought.

As for whether the concept of caste is ours or theirs, it is, in an important sense, neither. The concept of caste with which anthropologists are dealing is not one which is in general usage in any Western culture. Many anthropologists and sociologists, let alone the general public, have only the vaguest idea of what caste is all about. We can explain what such concepts mean in ordinary, everyday English, French, German, or whatever but equally we could explain them using Nepali, Newari, or Hindi.<sup>7</sup>

Anthropologists looking at the caste organization of the Newars have taken a number of different theoretical lines. The most recent, fitting in with the anthropological mood of the time, is to avoid discussion of caste altogether. This is effectively the approach of Levy, who thinks that we should avoid such generalizing concepts. Levy's reason for eschewing the term 'caste' (and others such as 'sub-caste' or '*jāti*') is to avoid what he sees as forcing the manifold relations between *thars* into 'a procrustean bed of generalizing analytic terms' (Levy 1990: 74). On this argument, however, his very useful concept of 'archaic city' would also have to be thrown out.

In any case, Levy has to find some kind of label for the Brāhmaṇs and Śreṣṭhas and Farmers and Kāpālīs and so on whose institutions and rituals he discusses so exhaustively for the city of Bhaktapur. Since the word 'caste' is so problematic, he simply drops it and coins the neologism 'macrostatus levels' instead. But this does not solve the underlying problem, which is: *why are there* Brāhmaṇs and Śreṣṭhas and Farmers and Kāpālīs and so on—groups who do not intermarry or interdine or perform rituals together, who may live in different quarters of the settlement and perhaps even have different kinds of architecture and clothing?

The concept of 'macrostatus levels' merely reintroduces the problem in disguise. Levy is not the first to point out the perils of the word 'caste'. Apart from Inden's charge of Orientalism, Baechler (1988) has argued that the concept of caste should be abandoned altogether, so much confusion does it cause. Instead, he states, we should revert to native terms such as *varṇa* and *jāti*. But, as I have written elsewhere, this does not offer a solution, for the meaning of these native concepts and their terms of reference is also the subject of exactly the same dispute.<sup>8</sup> At a purely pragmatic level, it is probably impossible to abandon the concept of caste altogether now anyway. This is not just because it has become so embedded in the literature and oral discourse on, and in, South Asia. Comparative sociology has no real alternative but to use

generalizing analytic concepts such as this, and in fact Levy himself later describes Bhaktapur as 'a typical Hindu "caste system"' (Levy 1990: 99).

Apart from Levy's approach to the problem of caste among the Newars, there have been three other types of solutions proffered. Again, these types basically mirror the explanations which have been offered for caste 'in general' (by which is inevitably meant, 'in India'), but there is a twist in some versions for the 'special case' of the Kathmandu Valley. Crudely, though not inaccurately, the three types of explanation could be labelled (1) the materialist, (2) the idealist, and (3) the royalist.<sup>9</sup>

The most widely quoted materialist author on caste among the Newars is Colin Rosser, whose hypothesis on social mobility was discussed in Chapter 3. The basic thesis is simple: caste is a form of social stratification where those who have are at the top and those who don't have are at the bottom; anything else is mere ideological mystification.<sup>10</sup> The obvious retort to this position is: why do Hindus go to such extraordinary lengths to indulge in ideological mystification? The ethnographies of the region are replete with examples of the concern with caste status as expressed through rituals of one kind or another. That there is never a clear, unambiguous correspondence between material wealth and social or ritual status seems a poor reason for such indulgence. If mystification, or false consciousness, is what one chooses to call the obsession with ritual status, it would appear to be indispensable and cannot simply be dismissed as if it were somehow an optional extra as the materialists imply.

The idealist position has no unambiguous supporter for the Newar case in particular but is nevertheless, among those who study the Newars, as among anthropologists of India, still the most widely endorsed theory for explaining caste in general. In order to describe both it and the 'royalist' alternative, it is simplest to turn directly to the two most eloquent exponents of the respective positions—Louis Dumont and Arthur Maurice Hocart.

Dumont's theory of caste is part of a lifetime's work comparing modern individualism with traditional 'holism'. He argues that the anti-individualistic nature of traditional society is manifested in a hierarchical consensus of values (1980: 20) and receives its clearest expression in the Indian caste system. Building on Bouglé (1908), he puts forward the idea that there is a single underlying principle which accounts for the three features of caste organization which are most often remarked upon. These features are: (1) separation of castes, e.g. in marriage and eating arrangements; (2) functional interdependence of castes; and (3) a hierarchical ordering which arranges castes along a status ladder. The principle which unites these features, according to Dumont, is the opposition of the pure and the impure: 'superiority and superior purity are identical' (Dumont 1980: 56).

Dumont claims that the opposition of pure and impure is sustained by a disjunction between (ritual) status and (secular) power and that this disjunction

characterizes Hindu society. According to the ideology of caste, he states, the spiritual superiority of Brāhmaṇs is hierarchically pre-eminent over the temporal authority of kings or politically and economically dominant castes. He emphasizes that this is a matter of ideology or values, not of brute facts. The actual facts, as reported by historians and anthropologists, tell a consistently different story: 'In theory, power is subordinate to priesthood, whereas in fact priesthood submits to power' (ibid. 71–2). Nevertheless, Dumont insists that the true logic of caste is to be found in its system of ideas, not in the observable world of power relations.

Why does he insist on this? For Dumont, ideas encompass facts, including those facts which contradict the values of the ideology. In the Indian case, 'the hierarchy of purity cloaks, among other differences, its own contrary' (ibid. 78). But this raises a problem. The would-be critic is prohibited from introducing ethnographic or historical evidence to counter Dumont's claims because according to him the underlying structure is in a system of ideas and not in any particular case. One cannot therefore produce individual contradictory examples to refute what Dumont claims to be the general principle.

But what is one supposed to do with contradictory evidence? A substantive example of this problem concerns Dumont's claim that the values underlying Hinduism are pre-eminently about priestly notions of purity and impurity. Parry (1980), Raheja (1988a), Shulman (1985), and others have demonstrated convincingly that certain Hindu priests (or others acting temporarily as priests) are treated on occasion as if they were Untouchables.<sup>11</sup> This distinctive and typical feature of caste organization is found also in Newar society as we will see when we return to Robert Levy below. If all of these authors are correct, Dumont's theory would make little sense since it depends on the equation of Brāhmaṇ priests with purity and the corresponding equation of Untouchables with impurity. The theory simply cannot cope with priests (whether regarded as Brāhmaṇs or not) whose status is at best seen to be intensely ambiguous and at worst defiled.

In any case, while certain priests may claim that their authority transcends others', it is now obvious that theirs is not the only claim. Das (1982) and Burghart (1978) have argued that Hindu ideology, far from speaking with one voice, presents a never-ending struggle for pre-eminence among the priest, the king, and the ascetic, each of whom is convinced of his own superiority.<sup>12</sup> To this trilogy one should perhaps add 'the people'—witness the myriad examples of Sanskritization and the mass conversions to Buddhism and Communism this century in South Asia. All of these have been attempts by various groups to improve their standing in society by rejecting the caste labels which have been assigned to them historically (which is to say by other, dominant groups).

There is no doubt, however, that concepts of purity and impurity are pervasive in Hindu culture. But while the Hindu recension of pollution concepts may be distinctive, in some sense all cultures, all systems of classification,

exhibit an opposition between pure and impure. In a way this is the defining mark of culture—the making of arbitrary boundaries and the attempt to invest them with sacredness, impregnability.<sup>13</sup> All societies exhibit elaborate rules and taboos to protect culturally ordained boundaries; in this respect India is not at all unique. One could similarly argue that the disjunction between status and power which Dumont alleges to be peculiar to caste is in fact a feature of all ideologies. Which ideology does *not* claim that brute force must be subordinated to higher values?

Let me now turn to Hocart's interpretation of caste systems, which has profoundly influenced Toffin's view of Newar social structure and the way in which certain others, including myself, view how caste works in general.<sup>14</sup> Hocart's main aim is to compare caste in India and Sri Lanka with certain other forms of social organization elsewhere. The central institution for comparative purposes, he claims, is kingship (and its associated ritual). For Hocart, castes are essentially 'families' which perform hereditary functions in order to ensure that the king and nobles remain free from pollution (1950: 17, 20). In other words, if one were to contrast Hocart's view with Dumont's, it is not that the priest *is* pure, but that the king or nobleman *should be* pure. *All* castes, including the lowest, in so far as they act to keep the king and nobles free from pollution, are performing priestly functions. So Barbers, Washermen, and so on are 'not so much technicians as priests of a low grade' (ibid. 4). The priest is thus a kind of instrument or vessel who facilitates the king's kingship or the noble's nobility.

Hocart argues that through ritual, paradigmatically sacrifice, the king becomes assimilated to the gods thereby simultaneously transcending the mundane social order and guaranteeing its security and fertility. (This is why the *kṣatriya* is not so much a warrior, as is commonly supposed, but the royal agent through whom order and well-being are continually regenerated.) He states that the function of kingship is replicated at all levels of society, with every caste seeking to emulate the royal prerogative by commanding rituals of its own. This is true even of those groups with comparatively few resources at their disposal (ibid. 68). Caste is, then, a question of being more or less close to the royal or noble centre, a question of birth or lineage (ibid. 32).

Hocart sometimes refers to kings as 'the first caste' and Brāhmaṇs as the second: 'The second caste supplies the priests, brahmins, who perform the rituals for the king or for whatever great man is offering the sacrifice' (ibid. 37). This is, of course, in marked contrast to most theories of caste, which place Brāhmaṇs unequivocally at the top. In fact Hocart at one point contradicts himself by saying that 'The great master of ritual we call a priest, and he is so high that he becomes higher than the king' (ibid. 68). Whoever is higher, though, Hocart is careful to insist, as indeed Dumont does, that priest and king form an inseparable pair (ibid. 38). The king and nobles need priests to perform their rituals and the priests need patrons to command the rituals.

Like Dumont, Hocart can be criticized for giving too much prominence to ideology, for seeing ideas as providing a sufficient blueprint for social organization. Unlike Dumont, however, Hocart repeatedly counters a more extreme idealist position by insisting on the need to make comparisons between caste-organized communities in different societies. What this leads to is an emphasis on common structures, articulated in terms of kingship, ritual, and kinship, and a demonstration that while caste depends on priests, it does not require that these priests be Brāhmaṇs. On the contrary, it is manifestly obvious that, even in Indian society, many priests are not Brāhmaṇs.

Returning to the Newar case, neither Levy nor Toffin accepts that Dumont's theory of caste fits the case of the Newars. Toffin explicitly adopts Hocart's emphasis on kingship while Levy, whose consideration of others' theories is rather weak, also underlines the role of the king. I will consider Levy first.

The common figure in both of Dumont's oppositions is the Brāhmaṇ priest. As an exemplar of purity (it is claimed), he is opposed to the Untouchable, while, as the representative *par excellence* of the religious sphere, he is opposed to the king, who represents the 'secular' domain. For Bhaktapur's Newars, Levy maintains the opposition of the pure Brāhmaṇ and the impure Untouchable but claims that the logic of the opposition of priest and king is not quite as Dumont would have it. He also points out that Newar Untouchables and many other castes perform priestly functions and in this sense they have something in common which unites them and sets them apart from the non-priestly groups.

Levy's arrangement of the 'macrostatus levels' of Bhaktapur is initially along a conventional hierarchical ladder of twenty distinct levels, with Brāhmaṇs at one end and Untouchables at the other. However, he claims that within this hierarchical system, roles and functions are assigned in two quite different ways. On the one hand, there is the 'civic social system' ranging from Brāhmaṇ to Untouchable which is concerned with *dharma*, ordinary deities, and the opposition of purity and impurity. On the other hand, there is another realm which ranges from the king down through farmers to the lowest-status craftsmen. In relation to the civic *dharma*, this realm appears as secular, but the king 'and others like him' (i.e. those who are not primarily ritual specialists) also have a special relation to dangerous deities. This religion of power, as he calls it, 'variously supports, evades, and transcends the moral order' which is underpinned by 'ordinary Brahmanical religion' (ibid. 602).

At the level of ideological representations, Levy's argument is persuasive and strongly documented. There are two points here. One concerns the fact that the same social structure throws up competing ideologies and none of these encompasses the others as completely as Dumont would have us believe. The other concerns the way in which ideology determines (or does not determine) the social structure. On this question, however, Levy's position is as problematic as Dumont's, and perhaps even more so. On Levy's argument, it is not the

Brāhmaṇ's representation in general which is responsible for the caste (civic) order, but that of the *king's* priest, the Rājopādhyāya. This seems to place an extraordinarily heavy weight on one functionary.

The central problem for both Dumont and Levy is whether a sociological explanation of caste can subjugate power to status in the way in which Brahmanic ideology appears to do. In suggesting that the sociologist must follow the Brāhmaṇ, Dumont argues that this is the only viable way of providing a unified explanation of the complex phenomenon of caste—that is, by uncovering the underlying structure of religious ideas. Levy is ambivalent on this point. On the one hand he argues that there are two structures of religious ideas, one concerned with *dharma*, the moral order, the other concerned with power. On the other hand, however, he also suggests that the symbolic structures of the mesocosm, the rituals through which the city expresses its unity to the outside world, provide an arena where ideological tensions can be resolved, or at least negotiated.<sup>15</sup>

Levy's arrangement of the 'castes' of Bhaktapur in a conventional status hierarchy produces a problem which has commonly been found elsewhere: there is a high level of consensus about who is at the 'top' and 'bottom' of the status hierarchy, but a certain amount of wrangling over the 'middle' positions. This should not be dismissed too quickly: the 'middle' positions account for the majority of the population. According to Levy's figures (1990: 97), the Farmer (Jyāpu) castes account for 54.59 per cent of the Newar Hindu households in Bhaktapur. If we add the Śreṣṭha (*chathariya* and *pāñcthariya*) castes, the figure jumps to 69.94 per cent. A simple status ladder obscures this demographic fact—that castes differ enormously in size—and its corollary, namely, that the large, 'middle' castes are internally differentiated along status lines according to the same principles by which castes are differentiated from each other.<sup>16</sup>

I have already drawn attention to this fact of status differentiation in Chapter 3 above on the Śreṣṭhas but one should also note its existence among the Maharjans. In Bhaktapur, Levy notes that there are two different levels of Farmers, the first of which is divided into seventy-four *thars*, the second into 146 *thars*. It is inconceivable that groups as large as this would not fragment into competing status groups, however shadowy the boundaries between such groups might be. One would expect the dividing lines between different Maharjan groups to be even more imprecise than that between *pāñcthariya* and *chathariya* Śreṣṭhas because there would be more difficulty in making testifiable appeals to either lineage or property as sources of superiority. Gellner and Pradhan's discussions of the Āwāle and Dāgols in Chapter 5 seem to bear this out.

More interesting, perhaps, are the various functionaries whom Levy allies to the Rājopādhyāya priest—'auxiliary priests and what we will call "para-priests," as well as various pollution-manipulating priest-like functionaries—



purifiers such as barbers and collectors of impurity such as, above all, the untouchables' (ibid. 345). Levy defines the auxiliary priest as someone who either helps the Brāhmaṇ perform a ritual or who takes his place because a Brāhmaṇ is not available or because Brāhmaṇs will not officiate for certain would-be patrons because they are of low status. 'Para-priests', on the other hand, 'are not properly priests themselves', according to Levy (ibid. 346). Their function is a preparatory one—to purify individuals so that they can worship within the sacred realm, not themselves to perform 'techniques of worship' within that realm. Within this category, says Levy, come the Nāpit barbers and the Joṣī astrologers.

However, Levy is forced to acknowledge that the distinctions between these various kinds of priests sometimes appear to break down. Most interesting is an institution revolving around a particular *chathariya thar* called Nākanda. As with other families, illness and misfortune caused by planetary influences are thought to be cured through a ritual conducted by a Brāhmaṇ who holds a mixture of different grains to the head of the sufferer. The Nākanda family, however, has the choice of sending the grains either to a kind of Brāhmaṇ known as a Bhaṭṭa Brāhmaṇ as *dāna* or to a Dyahḷā ['Po(n)']<sup>17</sup> Untouchable. The latter, says Levy, is the normal practice of other lineages and is seen as a way of transferring pollution to the Dyahḷā, who absorbs it. The Dyahḷā, many of whom are now sweepers, removing human faeces among other tasks, and who in the past were executioners, are seen as the 'lowest' caste of all in Bhaktapur's status hierarchy. They are in fact so 'low' that they are obliged to live outside the settlement, a situation which is commonly reported for Untouchables in other parts of South Asia.

Levy claims that 'This equivalence of Po(n) and Bhaṭṭa Brahman here suggests the polluting implications of many priestly services, and is typical of the services of the "auxiliary priests"' (ibid. 353).<sup>18</sup> He also states that these auxiliary priests are frequently referred to by the Rājopādhyāya as 'kinds of Brahmins' (ibid. 354). And indeed some of these function as domestic priests (*purohita*) to low-status families for whom the Rājopādhyāya will not officiate (ibid. 358).

Echoing Gould's characterization of 'contra-priests' (Gould 1971: 12) and Hocart's assertion that the low castes are 'priests of a low grade' (Hocart 1950: 11), Levy states that the primary function of the 'para-priests' is to absorb the pollution of those for whom they perform services. By keeping the latter free from pollution, they ensure order and decency. There is widespread agreement that the Dyahḷā (Po[n]) must do their job if the city order, the 'civic *dharma*' as Levy calls it, is to prevail.

Levy writes that what auxiliary priests and para-priests are doing is protecting the status of the Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇs, which is seen to be inherently ambiguous, both by themselves and by others, 'particularly upper-status people' (Levy 1990: 373). But ultimately, I would argue, it is not the

Rājopādhyāya's status which must be protected, but the status of those whom he serves—in former times, the king and the noble families who surrounded him; today, the noble families alone since Newar kings were displaced in the making of the modern state of Nepal. Relations between priests and the aristocratic lineages who are their patrons are, as they have always been, emulations or replications of the relation between priest and king. The very name 'Rājopādhyāya' ('king's councillor') signifies this.

It is for this reason that Levy's formulation of the order of castes misleads in the same manner as Dumont's. In Bhaktapur, Levy states,

the entire system of *thars* is arranged in a hierarchy of purity with the Brahman and Po(n) at its extreme ends . . . A Brahman who becomes impure would no longer effectively be a Brahman, and were an untouchable to become pure he would no longer be an untouchable. But a farmer is a farmer and a king is a king no matter what their state of purity. (Ibid. 396)

The problem with this statement is that those Brāhmaṇs who are priests are *continually* dealing in, and absorbing, impurity in precisely the same way that Untouchables are. If they were not, their status would not have the ambiguous quality which Levy and others demonstrate so clearly. It is also extremely doubtful that Farmers would remain Farmers and kings would remain kings if they compromised their status by failing to pass on their impurities to ritual specialists. It is, in fact, axiomatic that one would lose one's caste by not following the proper conventions whether one was a Farmer or a king, a Brāhmaṇ or a Barber. Perhaps the central feature of caste is that one cannot ride roughshod over one's ritual obligations without fear of losing one's status, one's very position in the community.

The weakness of Levy's position on this matter is made clear when he writes of the '*obscure* factors, deriving from history and power and class' (ibid. 397; my emphasis) which account for the way in which the king and others who do not have evidently ritual occupations are slotted into the hierarchical purity–impurity system of castes. But are the factors which account for the position of non-priestly groups so obscure? A kind of answer to this question is given by Levy himself in his next sentence: 'in this perspective the king is closer to the farmer than to the Brahman, and the Brahman is closer to the untouchable than to the king' (ibid. 397). To see why this should be so, let me turn to Toffin's analysis of Newar society.

Toffin's view of the Newars, as portrayed in his wide-ranging ethnography *Société et religion chez les Néwar du Népal*, is explicitly Hocartian in tone. His perspective is drawn substantially from his own considerable fieldwork experiences in the two, very different Newar settlements of Pyangaon and Panauti. Many of his conclusions come in the form of a set of distinctions made between the respective forms of social organization found in these two settlements—the former rural and mono-caste, the latter urban and multi-caste.<sup>19</sup>

Toffin's analysis centres on an opposition between settlements where kinship (*parenté*) is the dominant structuring principle and those where caste is the fundamental principle of social organization (1984: 585 ff.). This opposition, he argues, is synonymous with another: 'Newar society—perhaps one should say Newar societies—are stretched between two poles: on one side, the pole of the Tibeto-Burman tribes, on the other, the pole of India (particularly the North)' (ibid. 586–7). It is also a question of rural versus urban, and of low caste versus high caste.

The notion of Indianization, he says, is the crux of the matter. From the earliest known times the Newars have been within the sphere of Indian influence. From the south have come not only Hinduism and the caste system, but Mahāyāna Buddhism, the system of writing, law, and administrative organization, painting, and architecture. The influence has been much more marked, however, in the urban centres than in the rural areas—and among high castes rather than low. There is, says Toffin, an 'old tribal substratum on which Newar civilisation has been built' (ibid. 587) and it is still evident today in the culture and social organization of the peasant Maharjans (*Jyāpu*).

On the other hand, Toffin acknowledges that any polarization of these two types is somewhat idealized. He refers to them as 'only models' and as 'ideal types'; in reality there has been a great deal of synthesis 'in the villages no less than the towns' (ibid.). It is also clear that the peasants have been as prone to Indian cultural influences as their lords for several centuries and, conversely, that the high castes have in their socio-religious life elements 'which are *authentically Newar*, belonging to the most ancient layer' (ibid., emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

In other words, Toffin's argument is that the 'original' inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley did not have caste; this is something which was imposed on them by Hindu kings, and 'authentic' Newar society has been obscured by this development.<sup>21</sup> Toffin, however, is as keen to emphasize an underlying unity in Newar settlements as he is to demonstrate a tension between two poles. The rural habitat, for example, 'is not fundamentally different from the urban and the model of the traditional house is identical in the two cases' (Toffin 1984: 588). What is more, many of the villages were founded by royal decree and many were populated by emigrants from the towns. The historic connection between town and village can be seen today in the participation of villagers in city festivals and in their worship of tutelary deities (*digu dyah*) on the edges of the cities from which their ancestors originated (ibid.).

For Toffin, three main features distinguish caste among the Newars from caste in India. (To be precise, it should be said, 'caste in India as portrayed by Dumont' since Toffin, in line with many other anthropologists, accepts Dumont's account as an accurate representation of the standard Indian pattern.) These features are:

- the importance of territory;
- what Toffin calls the partial nature (*l'aspect partiel*) of the Newar caste system;
- the centralization of power.

In the Kathmandu Valley, Toffin says, the caste system 'does not embrace the whole of the society as in India' (ibid. 592). A few lines later he writes that there is an important difference with India, where 'hierarchy, the fundamental element of the system, structures all social relations' (ibid.). As for the centralization of power, Toffin argues that this provides *the* key to Newar civilization. All the evidence shows, he says, that power (particularly royal power) enjoys an importance in the Kathmandu Valley which is unrivalled in India (ibid.).

We can take the importance of territory for the Newars as a given since everyone is agreed on it. The description of the local caste system as partial is much more problematic, however, because it is premised on an understanding of how caste operates in India which is, I think, debatable. This has an immediate bearing on the question of whether centralization of power distinguishes the Newar case from the Indian case; this also must be looked at carefully.

As was pointed out earlier, Dumont claims that the distinctive feature of caste in India is a disjunction of status and power such that power (represented by the king or dominant caste—the *kṣatriya varṇa*) is subordinated to status (represented by the Brāhmaṇ priest). Toffin points out that this disjunction is not fully respected by the Newars. The Karmācārya priests, who are widely regarded as *kṣatriya* because of their inferiority to the Rājopādhyāya, and because they intermarry with *chatharīya Śreṣṭhas*, provide one illustration of this. The position of kings is another:

The role of kings in raising impure castes to the status of pure castes, the extremely curious links which the ruler maintains with his tutelary deities who are the source of his power, and the central, radiating position of the palace in the city are other features which make it clear that among the Newars the political is not distinguished from, and subordinated to, the religious as in India. (Ibid.)

Toffin goes on to say that it is no accident that Hocart's sacrificial model of caste, in which royal power occupies centre stage, fits best in Sri Lanka (where Hocart made his own first-hand observations on caste) and in the Kathmandu Valley. The reason it fits well in these two places, he says, is that both were on the periphery of Hindu India, and both were much more heavily influenced by Buddhism.

However, while politics refuses to submit to religion in the Kathmandu Valley, Toffin nevertheless maintains that: 'If there is one trait which characterises Newar society, it is the penetration of religion at all levels of the social structure' (ibid. 593). In fact he calls this pervasive penetration of religion the central theme of his study.

Toffin is not the only one to argue that the Newars provide a special case which does not fit the conventional picture of caste that we have for India. In a paper which focuses on the position of women, and is rather critical of both Toffin’s and Michael Allen’s depiction of Newar society as resting on a tribal substratum, David Gellner has argued that the tribe–caste (or Hindu–tribal) opposition does little justice to the complex nature of Newar society.

Gellner’s argument revolves around three tables which I will examine briefly here. He begins by succinctly drawing up the main differences between tribe and caste as these have been most commonly understood by scholars (and administrators) in South Asia. The dichotomy is reproduced as Table 10.1.

From the point of view of the argument I wish to develop, the reader should note that only one word, namely ‘Brahman’, indicates that we are dealing with South Asia and Hinduism. The other features are purely structural, as opposed to cultural, characteristics. No particular language or religion is mentioned and in fact the table would have made perfect sense if the word ‘Brahman’ had been omitted altogether.

It needs to be stressed that the features on either side of the dichotomy are package deals. On the caste side, one might perhaps add that it is not simply settled agriculture we are dealing with but agriculture in relatively fertile areas such as river basins. Under such conditions peasants can produce substantial amounts of grain surplus to their own requirements and it is this which makes possible the elaborate division of labour and the plethora of specialists, religious and other. Without getting into tricky questions of what comes first, some kind of hierarchical political centralization inevitably seems to develop in tandem with such a scenario.<sup>22</sup>

With reference to the particular case of the Newars, Gellner points out that it is commonly argued that they represent a special, even peculiar, case. Typical are the statements of Höfer (1979: 43–4) and Gaborieau (1978: 198) which he quotes. Both argue that in one, autochthonous sense the Newars belong to the Tibeto-Burman-speaking tribes of the hills of Nepal. On the other hand, however, there is clearly a vast difference between the social organization of these latter groups, which is predominantly based on kinship, and that of the

TABLE 10.1. *‘The tribe–caste dichotomy’*

Tribe	Caste
Equality	Hierarchy
Simple division of labour	Elaborate division of labour
Swidden agriculture or pastoralism	Settled agriculture
Position beyond state control	Under state control
Own religious specialists	Brahman and other literate religious specialists

Source: Gellner (1991), 107, table 1.

TABLE 10.2. 'Some crude associations of the Hindu/tribal dichotomy as applied to Nepal'

Tribe	Hindu
Tibeto-Burman language	Indo-European language
Indigenous origin, or origin to north and east	Origin in India
'Animism' and/or Buddhism	Hinduism
Loose sexual morality	Strict control of women
Remarriage for widows and divorcées permitted	Remarriage of widows and divorcées scandalous
Marriage with MBD preferred	Marriage with cousins forbidden
Bride-price or bride service	Dowry
Hypogamous or isogamous ideal	Hypergamous ideal

Source: Gellner (1991), 108, table 2.

urban Newars with their complex caste systems. In order to see where the Newars can be placed along the tribe–caste continuum, Gellner first draws up another table, which looks at the way in which this dichotomy has been assumed to work by scholars looking at Nepal.<sup>23</sup> This is reproduced as Table 10.2.

Note that a certain change has taken place in the terms of reference. Of this Gellner says: 'where writers on Nepal tend to oppose tribe to *Hindu*, writers on India oppose tribe to *caste*; but it is the same contrast which is being made in each case' (ibid. 106–7). But is it the same contrast, simply a difference of terminology, as implied here? I would argue that it is not. To oppose Hindu to tribal in the manner of Table 10.2 is to suggest that there is some kind of inherent, package-deal connection between the elements on either side of the dichotomy just as there is in the caste–tribe opposition. However, it is misleading to argue that Tibeto-Burman language is associated, in a quasi-naturalistic way, not only with geographical origins, but with clan organization, 'loose' sexual morality, and so on. Such associations, where they hold, are contingent, not automatic.

Structural features such as caste organization inevitably go with other structural forms, such as complexity and centralization. Cultural features such as language, however, need not be tied to any particular structural form. There is no reason why Tibeto-Burman language should not be associated with non-tribal forms of social organization, strict sexual morality, and all of the elements one normally finds with caste, or indeed with the kinds of features one might find in an industrial society. Gellner gives a good example of why the associations which are frequently made in the anthropology of Nepal are not only crude, but untenable:

High-caste Newar Buddhists, for example, would place both Buddhism and the isogamous ideal in the right-hand column. This fact should be sufficient in itself to demonstrate the inadequacy of the Hindu–tribal dichotomy as an analytical tool. (Gellner 1991: 109)

TABLE 10.3. ‘*Opposed characteristics of three systems used to conceptualize Newar society*’

Tribal system	Newar system	North Indian Brahmanic System (NIBS)
Cross-cousin marriage preferred or permitted	Marriage with cross-cousins forbidden	Marriage with cross-cousins forbidden
Isogamy or hypogamy	Isogamy	Hypergamy for dominant group
Bride-price or bride service	Dowry (primarily woman’s property)	Dowry and groom price
DH serves WF	Polite avoidance between in-laws	DH worshipped as Viṣṇu
Divorce and remarriage easy	Divorce occurs but difficult	Divorce very rare indeed
Widowhood has no stigma	Widowhood has stigma	Widowhood has severe stigma
Virginal consanguineal girls have no special status	Virginal consanguineal girls have no special status; selected girls worshipped as Kumārī	Virginal consanguineal girls are worshipped
<i>Ihi</i> not practised <sup>a</sup>	<i>Ihi</i> practised	<i>Ihi</i> not practised
Compatible with Buddhism or Hinduism	Compatible with Buddhism or Hinduism	Compatible only with Hinduism

<sup>a</sup> *Ihi*: a form of mock marriage in which a child is married to a deity. See, for example, M. R. Allen (1975) and Vergati (1982).

Source: Gellner (1991), 119, table 3.

In order to understand the Newar case, Gellner proposes that we replace the Hindu–tribal dichotomy with a trichotomy. This is reproduced as Table 10.3.<sup>24</sup> Gellner is careful to state that he is not suggesting some kind of linear evolution, or that the Newar case forms an intermediate type. It is equally important to understand, he argues, that there is no clear cut-off point between one system and another:

Many have been tempted to see what I call the Newar system as a mere staging post *en route* towards the Brahmanic one. My purpose in proposing three systems instead of two is to suggest that, although it might be right in some circumstances to see the Newar system in this way, we should not be *constrained* to do so by the concepts we use. It might perhaps be best to imagine the three ideal-typical systems as the points of a triangle. There might then be a route from the Tribal to the NIBS via the Newar, but alternative routes would be equally possible. In the present cultural and political context the NIBS appears as orthodox and anyone who differs from it (tribes, Newars, low castes) as unorthodox. At an earlier historical period it is likely that the Newar system, at least in this region, was itself the orthodoxy. (Ibid. 120)

This characterization raises a number of problems however. What *are* the circumstances under which the Newar system might be seen as a staging post? Why should it be valid to see Newar society in this way in some circumstances

but not others? What counts as orthodoxy and who is the arbiter of it, particularly since most Newars would claim that their caste system is as orthodox as any? Have Newars deviated from the 'orthodox' Indian system to the point where they present a distinctive form of social organization?<sup>25</sup> To suggest that Newars offer a third ideal-typical system seems to me to go too far.

The problem arises, I think, because the main feature which unites the Newar caste systems with caste systems in India and separates them from tribal societies, whether in India or Nepal, appears in neither of Gellner's later two models. This feature is centralization. Caste systems require centralized political, economic, and ritual structures while tribal communities are effectively defined by the absence of centralization. It is centralization, albeit a rather unstable centralization, which accounts for the other characteristics which we associate with caste.<sup>26</sup> And it is this feature which allows one to see that the Newar caste systems, like the Indian systems, are variations on a theme. The central contrast is, then, as Gellner's first table presents it: between caste systems, which are relatively centralized and highly differentiated (whether in India or Nepal), and tribal communities, which are relatively uncentralized and undifferentiated (whether in India or Nepal).

I would stress that we are talking here of Newar caste systems (plural) and Indian caste systems (plural). Simply in terms of the number of castes which are represented in any particular settlement there is wide variation, and the degree of elaboration varies enormously from village to 'climax community'. Similarly, while there is a widespread pattern in north India which is characterized by the prevalence of hypergamy and large, dispersed groupings, the close-knit, isogamous pattern which typifies Newar communities and is often reported for south India is clearly quite different. On the other hand, the previous chapters show clearly that, in spite of this variation, the underlying pattern of social organization is remarkably similar from the smallest Newar settlement to the largest.

Among these Newar configurations of caste, as Gellner has suggested, is to be found the paradigm of a full-blown caste society.<sup>27</sup> It is exemplified by any of the old royal cities, but particularly well by Bhaktapur, which has resisted to a much greater extent the encroachments of the modern world. It is the urban, king-centred structure of these 'archaic' cities which allows caste to manifest itself in all its glory. Levy's expression 'climax Hinduism' captures the sense of this perfectly provided that one understands that Hinduism is something much more encompassing than Brahmanism. The predominantly Buddhist city of Lalitpur displays the same caste-based, palace-centred pattern.

Caste in the Kathmandu Valley is not some poor reflection of a more 'orthodox' Hindu pattern to the south and 'Indianization' is not, I would argue *contra* Toffin, the crucial variable which accounts for the pattern of Newar social organization which we see today. The defining criterion is structural, not



cultural. In this respect, Toffin is undoubtedly correct to lay emphasis on the question of centralization though one should stress that this is a matter of degree.<sup>28</sup>

The more amorphous, 'Brahmanic' pattern of caste organization which is typical of the plains of north India presents an incomplete picture in so far as the royal dimension has been lost through colonial domination. On the other hand, the extent to which it *has* disappeared seems to vary rather interestingly from one ethnography to another. Both Galey (1989) and Raheja (1988*a, b*) argue that in spite of kingship having disappeared as an ostensible political fact in modern India, the underlying structure of kingship remains since dominant castes continue to play the kingly, centralizing role with all its attendant pomp and ritual. Those who have the means still 'hold court' by being attended to by specialists from a variety of castes. And it does not take too much readjustment of the (Dumontian) way in which ethnographies have normally represented the caste order over the last thirty years or so to see that dominant castes throughout India have always emulated the royal function.

The principle of replicating the royal function is clearly the foundation of the so-called *jajmānī* system, where dependent castes are joined to dominant, land-owning households.<sup>29</sup> It is not, as some have argued, the political/economic subjugation of some groups by others which is the really interesting feature of *jajmānī* relationships.<sup>30</sup> It is the fact that these relationships are hereditary and that they depend on being buttressed repeatedly through ritual. It is this use of ritual which is at the very heart of royalty, a point clearly noted by Fortes in a seminal article on installation ceremonies,<sup>31</sup> and it is no accident that the vernacular *jajmānī* derives from the Sanskrit *yajamāna*—the patron of a Vedic sacrifice, paradigmatically a royal patron.

How then should one represent the order of castes? As Gellner has stated in his Introduction, my own preference would be for abandoning linear, ladder-like hierarchies altogether. He argues that Nepalīs themselves have arranged castes along a linear hierarchy (see, for example, Höfer 1979). While this is true, Nepalīs also commonly represent the caste order in a quite different manner which brings out the fact that relations between castes are inherently ambiguous—both relations between patrons and priestly castes and those between different castes of priests themselves. Tables are almost inevitably linear and immediately lead one to the idea that some castes are 'higher' than others and that one of these must be the 'highest' of all. But this sense of linearity, which suggests a lack of ambiguity about the position of most castes, is, I would argue, quite spurious.

I would also be reluctant to reduce the sum total of castes in any locality to a definitive number of blocs since this seems to me rather arbitrary.<sup>32</sup> What might seem true enough of some of the Newar caste systems does not fit so well in others let alone for caste systems in general. The caste composition of the old royal cities of the Kathmandu Valley is instructive but it should not be over

'substantialized' to use Dumont's term. Rather, the model of caste which one uses there should also serve elsewhere.

The model I would prefer would be based around a dominant centre comprising landholding lineages which ideally would have at *its* centre a king, and in the past actually did so in many cases.<sup>33</sup> This model is precisely analogous to the *maṇḍala*, or sacred diagram, which is very widespread in South and South-East Asia. Paraphrasing Tucci (1969) and Shepard (1985), Gellner writes that 'the mandala is the model which underlies the organization of space, ritually and socially, in Newar cities and former kingdoms . . . as a means of spatial organization [it] can be reduced to three principles: boundedness, hierarchy, and the importance of the centre' (Gellner 1993: 219).<sup>34</sup> By adapting the *maṇḍala* model to illustrate the structure of caste organization, one sees that, structurally speaking, priests of all kinds, whether Brāhmaṇs or Barbers or Untouchables by caste, are in an analogous relation with respect to those who retain them.

This does not imply that these groups are identical: clearly they are not. They are divided by kinship and marriage, and they do not interdine or perform their domestic rituals in common. It is equally obvious that they perform quite different kinds of priestly functions. But there is, nevertheless, a structural similarity between the performance of sacrificial ritual, the paring of nails, and the nightly sweeping away of faeces and other dirt. All are rites of purification without which others would be unable to claim any legitimacy for their status. And for the dominant castes this would mean being deprived not only of the ritual underpinning of their status but of their ability to hold the community together.

What kingship (and its emulation by dominant caste households) essentially represents is the creation of a pure, timeless centre of perfect health where all about is fragmentation and decay, impermanence and defilement. As many others have noted, it is kingship and not the king which reigns.<sup>35</sup> This idea of kingship, as it finds expression through caste, could be represented as in Fig. 10.1.

This picture is of course very simple and idealized.<sup>36</sup> In practice castes will vary enormously in size while some groups (e.g. merchants) may function in more than one community. Some castes and some lineages will legitimately claim to be 'higher'—i.e. nearer the royal centre—in terms of power and pedigree than others. Most castes will be differentiated internally into lineages some of which may prefer to intermarry thus setting up more or less exclusive sub-groups (like the *chatharīya Śreṣṭhas*) within the caste. Untouchables may be regarded as both in the community and outside it since their function is to take out 'pollution' (i.e. whatever threatens order) and since in actuality they must often literally live apart. There will usually also be others (renouncers, independent sects) somewhere in the vicinity who live away from, or even in the middle of, the caste-ordered communities. And there may well be members

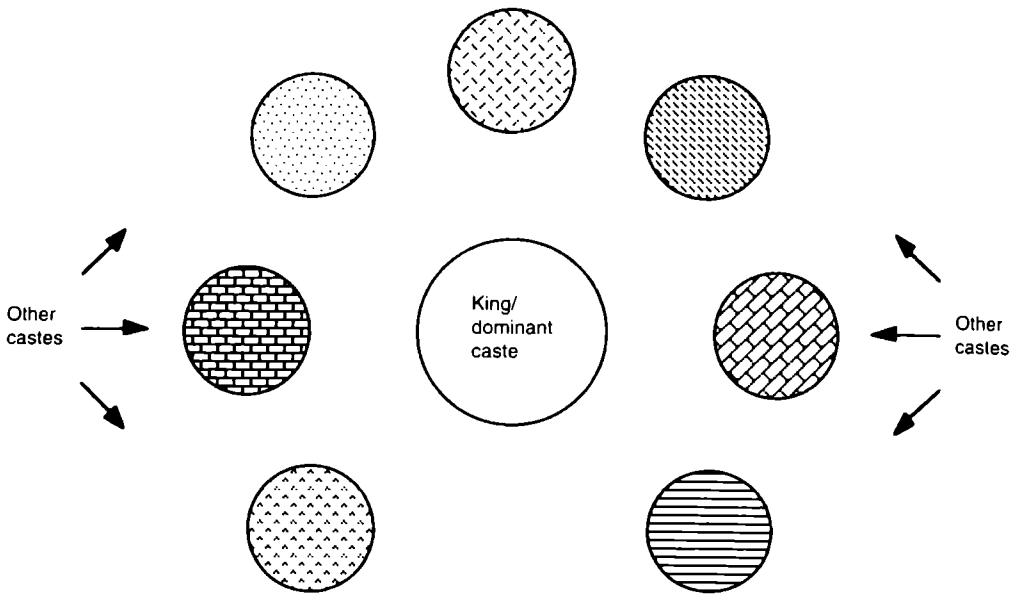


FIG. 10.1. The general structure of caste systems

of ethnic groups living in a community who may or may not be accorded a caste status, or whose position is ambiguous.

It is also important to remember, as Hocart pointed out, that it is not only members of the dominant caste who have others attached to them. Anyone with the wherewithal will find someone to perform purificatory rituals for their household. And effectively this means every single household because one can always, at the worst, ask one's affines to perform purificatory functions. Each household will thus attempt to emulate the picture above with itself at the centre and other castes attached to it in various capacities.<sup>37</sup>

Nicholas Dirks's historical study of the small south Indian kingdom of Pudukkottai provides a further bench-mark for this kind of king-centred model and aids both the understanding of caste in general and the social organization of the Kathmandu Valley in particular:

Because Pudukkottai was not brought under patrimonial control—neither that of the Islamic rulers in the south nor later that of the British—caste was never set completely loose from kingship . . . the historical case of Pudukkottai strongly suggests that the caste system, and its attendant hierarchical forms, reached a particular stage of development and articulation under a social formation in which the king was supreme . . . The demise of kingship was accompanied by the steady ascendancy of the Brahman, as the maintainer of social order and the codes of caste. (Dirks 1987: 9–10)

There is no doubt that the colonial elevation of the Brāhman to unambiguous superiority flies in the face of evidence, both ethnographic and textual, from every corner of the Hindu world.<sup>38</sup> At best the status of the Brāhman priest is extremely ambiguous because priesthood always carries with it defilement. This is not simply a matter of abstract philosophy. It is the job of the priest to

accept the pollution of the patrons of domestic rituals, temple *pūjās*, death rites, and so on in exchange for 'gifts' most commonly referred to as *dān* in vernacular languages (Skt. *dāna*). What the beautifully complex example of Bhaktapur illustrates with its multiplicity of priests is that, unsurprisingly, no kind of priest wants to be stuck with the pollution of others and each seeks another vessel to absorb it and ultimately take it out of the system altogether.<sup>39</sup>

Pudukkottai and Bhaktapur, at opposite ends of the subcontinent, are far from being isolated historical examples of the crucial ways in which priests of all kinds are subservient to the king or patron in caste-organized communities. It is through the relationship between priest and king (or priest and patron), I would argue, that one sees the underlying structure of all inter-caste relations. Dirks seems to me to confuse the issue, however, when he writes that:

Many current theories of caste, particularly those emphasizing Brahmanic obsessions concerning purity and impurity, or the proper and improper mixing of substances, are in large parts artifacts of colonialism, referring to a situation in which the position of the king has been displaced, and sometimes destroyed. (Ibid. 9)

There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that colonialism is in any way responsible for the rules and restrictions revolving around food, marriage, and contact of other kinds which all Hindus observe and which every foreign observer encounters on his or her first day in a Hindu settlement.<sup>40</sup> The concern with such notions was there long before the British or the Portuguese first showed up in India and has always been at the heart of caste quite independently of outside representations of the phenomenon.

It was not colonizers who somehow brought about the idea that certain Untouchables should either not come out at night or *only* come out at night, that they should live apart, should seek water from sources other than those used by the 'clean' castes, should refrain from wearing gold and silver ornaments, and should forbid their women from covering the upper part of their bodies.<sup>41</sup> It was not colonizers who somehow brought about the practice of hypergamy whereby those of lower status seek to improve themselves through marriage alliances with families of higher status.<sup>42</sup> It was not colonizers who brought the idea of the 'poisonous gift', passed from patron to officiant in the course of a ritual.

Moreover, contrary to the impression given by Dirks in the above quotation, Hindu 'obsessions' with purity and pollution do not derive fundamentally from Brahmanic teachings. The pervasiveness of such notions and their accompanying ritual among all castes derive, rather, from the conflicting pulls of kinship and kingship in a relatively unstable political climate. That is to say, pollution concepts attached to caste are an expression of the need felt by differentially powerful kinship groupings to assert and defend their integrity *vis-à-vis* each other in a situation where this integrity is forever in danger of being compromised, both from within and without.<sup>43</sup>

Today the Indian kings, like the Newar kings, are gone, but kingship in Hindu South Asia lives on through caste. In the Kathmandu Valley we see this very clearly because so many of the cities' rituals are royal rituals, where the traditional relationships between different castes are publicly enacted again and again and again. What we would argue, with the evidence presented in this book and the much greater volume of evidence to be found in the works to which we have referred, is that Newar society provides as good a terrain for the study of caste as one might hope to find.

### Notes

1. Dumont (1964: 98) and see Ch. 1, p. 21 above.
2. See also Rowe (1973: 212): 'From very earliest times, the Indian city has provided a symbolic representation of the social order, both in its spatial arrangements and in its social structure. In the city we note arrangements reflecting the necessities of caste, kinship, and association, and these mirror concerns of the totality of Indian society.' See also Ramanujan (1970) for a number of early Indian Sanskrit and Tamil representations of the city.
3. See, for example, Levy (1990: 693–4), who is discussed below.
4. The standard work on the Newar city and its symbolism is now Levy (1990), who is discussed below, but one should also consult Toffin (1982; 1984; 1990; 1993a), Slusser (1982), Gutschow and Kölver (1975), Gutschow (1982), and Gellner (1993). Wheatley (1967; 1971), Sjöberg (1960), Finley (1977), Fox (ed.) (1970), Fox (1977), and Geertz (1980) are very useful for comparative purposes as is the seminal work of Fustel de Coulanges (1956 [1864]).
5. Levy (1990: 24) quotes Wheatley again here: 'the society of the temple-city was neither fully *contractus*, *civitatis*, *Gesellschaft* nor organic' (Wheatley 1971: 349).
6. See Höfer (1979).
7. Dumont's claim that caste is a concept which is uniquely Hindu or uniquely Indian (it is not always clear which) is equally misleading, though for different reasons, some of which are explained below.
8. See Quigley (1993: 4 ff.).
9. See also Webster (1993) for an analysis of different scholars' views of caste among the Newars.
10. For various recensions of this view as applied to India, see Meillasoux (1973), Menscher (1974), and Berreman (1979).
11. See Quigley (1993: ch. 4) for a detailed exposition of this problem.
12. As a matter of interest, asceticism is not highly valued in Newar society. This appears to be the obverse of the high premium placed on conformity and sociability.
13. See especially Douglas (1970).
14. See Toffin (1984; 1993a), Raheja (1988a, b), and Dirks (1987, 1989). Elsewhere I have discussed both Dumont and Hocart at length as well as a number of other theories of caste which are in circulation (see Quigley 1993). For the most part, however, these other theories are overly reductionist and fail to account for much of what is known about caste.

15. In its emphasis on the pervasiveness of ritual, Levy's study of Bhaktapur echoes Geertz's (1980) *Negara: The Theatre-State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. ('Negara' comes from the Sanskrit *nagara*—'city, centre of civilization'.)
16. While retaining a ladder-like construction, Gellner's Figs. 1.2 and 1.3 in Ch. 1, which illustrate the relative sizes of Newar caste blocs, show clearly that the configuration of castes is not a simple league table. For comparative material on north India, one might consult Parry (1979).
17. Also known as 'Poḍe'.
18. The equivalence which Levy makes here gains much in force by being compared to Raheja's important treatment of the same complex in the Gangetic plain in *The Poison in the Gift* (1988). The implications of this equivalence are discussed at length in Quigley (1993: ch. 4).
19. One should note, however, that Panauti is very small compared to Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, and Maharjans are virtually absent there.
20. The passage is quoted in full by Gellner on pp. 31–2 above.
21. Fürer-Haimendorf reached a similar conclusion, though he describes autochthonous Newar society as Buddhist, rather than Tibeto-Burman or tribal: 'a predominantly Buddhist society would seem gradually to have assumed many features of the Indian caste system in its more rigid mediaeval form' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1956: 17).
22. For a rough, but useful, guide to this question, see Crone (1989).
23. On the crudity, or inapplicability, of a simple tribe–caste opposition in the Nepalese context, see, for example, P. R. Sharma (1978), N. J. Allen (1987), and Toffin (1981c).
24. In response to Gellner's model, Ishii, in Ch. 4 above, provides extensive new data on divorce, widowhood, dowry, and affinal relations for the village of Satungal which he compares directly with Toffin's findings for Pyangaon and Panauti and mine for Dhulikhel.
25. See for example the statement that, 'there has been a tendency both on the part of the Parbatiyās, and on that of foreigners who have accepted the dominant or official viewpoint, to assume that what the Parbatiyās do constitutes Hindu orthodoxy, and what other groups do is a deviation from it. *In some circumstances such a view may even be correct*' (Gellner 1991: 109, emphasis added).
26. See Quigley (1993: ch. 7) and also Baechler (1988).
27. 'One hypothesis such a line of enquiry might pursue is that both the Newar system and the NIBS are variants of social structural forms propagated from urban royal centres at different periods of South Asian history. It is certain that there is wide variation across India in the way in which the NIBS is put into practice' (Gellner 1991: 121–2). See also his earlier statement that 'the Newars are a paradigm of complex urban, highly Sanskritized South Asian civilization, and are therefore the very opposite of tribal in the South Asian sense' (Gellner 1986: 117–18).
28. The case of Pudukkottai in south India, which is discussed below, shows that caste in India can be quite effectively centralized.
29. For a critique of the concept of the *jajmānī* system and a very useful bibliography on the subject, see Fuller (1991).
30. See especially Beidelman (1959).
31. Fortes (1968).

32. It would be interesting to ask just what is the minimum number of castes, or caste blocs, required to form a functioning system; but this is beyond the scope of this essay.
33. 'In the classical Hindu world view, an ordered society is predicated on kingship, and kingship is undoubtedly the first key to appreciating the relation between the Hindu temple and society' (Fuller 1988: 57). Of the Newar towns, Toffin writes: 'The town is defined first of all by its sovereign. As in the Indian world, that which is urban is identified with royalty: no town worthy of its name is without a king, no king is without a recognized capital. The very structure of the city, centred around the palace, brings out the prime co-ordinating role of royalty' (Toffin 1990: 102). Note also Ishii's words above (Ch. 4, p. 114): 'It is not the Brāhmaṇ but the Śreṣṭhas who occupy the central position even in ritual matters of the village. The Śreṣṭhas have also been dominant in the political and economic spheres.' See also Gellner's king-centred representation adapted from R. P. Pradhan (1986: 381) (Gellner: 1992: 48, fig. 8).
34. In this article, which stresses the idea of the Newar cities as sacred centres, Gellner lists some of the essential features of the *maṇḍala*. Among these are the following: 'the principal god worshipped is in the centre; . . . there is a definite boundary marking off the inside from the outside; [and] there is a series of concentric circles around the divinity, so that exclusion from or proximity to the sacred can also be a matter of degree' (Gellner 1993: 224). Pieper, who reproduces a number of *maṇḍala* designs, argues that the plan of the Newar house 'is based on the same idea as the layout of the town. Ideally, the four sides face the cardinal points, and the buildings enclose a square courtyard. A raised platform in the centre holds the family sanctuary . . .' (Pieper 1975: 58).
35. Feeley-Harnik (1985) is a very useful introduction to the literature on divine kingship. See also the two collections of essays by Cannadine and Price (eds.) (1987) and Galey (ed.) (1990).
36. I have shown how the local caste system might look from the viewpoint of different groups in Quigley (1993: 153–6).
37. As Eliade writes (1959: 9), 'reality is conferred through participation in the "symbolism of the Center": cities, temples, houses become real by the fact of being assimilated to the "center of the world"'. A similar argument has been made for 19th-century Bali in Geertz's (1980) study of the 'theatre-state'. Commenting on this in his review of 'regal-ritual cities', Fox writes that 'The central ruler is a symbolic embodiment, a model or image of the state society; he concentrates in his person and household symbolic attributes of rule that are duplicated by lesser chiefs and rulers down the scale of state organization' (Fox 1977: 42).
38. For interesting comparative evidence on the relationships between priests and kings, see also Raheja (1988*b*), Biardeau (1989), and Fuller (1984, 1985).
39. Gellner (1992: 121–2) gives four reasons why many Newars do *not* generally think that a priest accepts the inauspiciousness of the donor, but all of these imply that something unwanted is transferred with *dān* payments and must somehow be channelled away. He also points out that the main recipients of such payments, castes of ritual specialists, 'often regard the obligation to accept *dān* from their patrons or parishioners as an unpleasant duty, which is, if possible, to be avoided' (ibid. 121).

40. Selwyn (1980) provides a very useful account of interactions and prohibitions revolving around food which preoccupy all of the castes in a Central Indian village. See Moffatt (1979) and Deliège (1992) for contrary opinions on whether Untouchables replicate the caste structures of those who dominate and exclude them. Raheja (1988*a, b*) argues that 'inauspiciousness' rather than 'impurity' provides the principal axis for ordering castes. As I have argued elsewhere, however (Quigley 1993: 86), the distinction is something of a red herring as far as the underlying sociological pattern of caste organization is concerned. The preoccupation with both pollution and inauspiciousness is an attempt to ensure that centralized structures, paradigmatically focused on the king, and in today's post-colonial reality focused on dominant castes, do not break down.
41. For some illustrations of such practices among the Newars, see Ch. 9. For comparative material, see Deliège (1992), Hutton (1946: 167–94), and Moffatt (1979).
42. Parry's (1979) account of hypergamy is particularly clear.
43. I have argued this in greater detail in Quigley (1993: ch. 7).





# APPENDIX: NEWARI KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

A Summary by D. N. Gellner

Generation	Term	Most common referent	Other referents
+2	<i>āju</i> (Bh. <i>ajā</i> ) or Np. <i>bājyā</i>	FF, MF <sup>a</sup>	FFB, MFB; prefixed with <i>tāpā</i> :- +3 generation
	<i>aji</i>	FM, MM <sup>a</sup>	FMZ, MMZ
+1	<i>bā</i> , <i>bwā</i> (Bh. <i>abwā</i> ) (archaic: <i>abu</i> )	F	
	<i>tahbā</i> (‘big father’) (Bh. <i>taribwā</i> ) (archaic: <i>ābā</i> , <i>āwā</i> , <i>ābwā</i> , <i>dhwābwā</i> )	FeB	MeZH
	<i>kakā</i> (Bh. <i>ciribwā</i> )	FyB	
	<i>cidhibā</i> (‘little father’)	MyZH	FyZH, <sup>b</sup> FyB
	<i>mā̃</i> / <i>mā</i> (Bh. <i>amā</i> )	M	
	<i>tahmā̃</i> or <i>tadhimā̃</i> (‘big mother’)	MeZ, FeBW <sup>c</sup>	FeW, FM, MM
	<i>camā̃</i> , <i>cimā̃</i> , <i>cāmā̃</i> , or <i>cā̃</i> (‘little mother’)	MyZ <sup>d</sup>	
	<i>cidhimā̃</i> (‘little mother’)	FyW	MyZ
	<i>māmā</i> , <i>māmaju</i> , or <i>mumāju</i> (or Np. <i>kāki</i> )	FyBW (Bh. MZ)	
	<i>pāju</i>	MB	FZH
	<i>tadhipāju</i>	MeB	
	<i>cidhipāju</i> , <i>capāju</i>	MyB	MyZH
	<i>malju</i> , <i>maleju</i>	MBW	
	<i>nini</i>	FZ	

Generation	Term	Most common referent	Other referents
+1 cont.	<i>jicā pāju</i> or <i>nini pāju</i>	FZH	
0	<i>dāju</i> (Bh. <i>arā</i> )	eB	all older consanguineal males of ego's genealogical level
	<i>kijā</i>	yB	all younger consanguineal males of ego's level
	<i>tatā</i> (Bh. <i>atā</i> )	eZ	all older consanguineal females of ego's level
	<i>kehē</i>	yZ	all younger consanguineal females of ego's level
	<i>jicā bhāju</i> or <i>jicā dāju</i>	eZH	
	<i>jicā, jilājā, or</i> <i>jicā bhāju</i>	yZH	DH, BDH
	<i>tatāhju</i>	eBW	
	<i>bhau, bhaumacā,</i> or <i>bhamcā</i> <sup>c</sup>	yBW	SW, any junior in-marrying female
	<i>bhāhta</i>	H	
	<i>kalāḥ</i> (Bh. <i>misā,</i> 'woman')	W	
	<i>sasaḥ</i>	W's house	prefixed to any of the primary terms refers to a man's in-laws
	<i>bhata, bhṃata</i>	eBW <sup>f</sup>	suffixes to most of the primary terms refers to a woman's in-laws <sup>g</sup>
-1	<i>samdhi, samji</i>	SWP, DHP	
	<i>kāy</i>	S	
	<i>kāycā</i>	msBS, wsZS	
	<i>mhyāy</i>	D	
	<i>mhyāycā</i>	msBD, wsZD	
	<i>bhincā</i> (Bh. <i>bhēcā</i> ) (pl. <i>bhinnamasta</i> )	msZC, wsBC	

Generation	Term	Most common referent	Other referents
	<i>bhau</i>	SW	yBW, any junior in-marrying female
	<i>jicā</i>	DH	BDH, yZH
-2	<i>chay</i>	CC	
-3	<i>chwi</i>	CCC	

*Abbreviations:* F = father, M = mother, B = brother, Z = sister, H = husband, W = wife, e = elder, y = younger, S = son, D = daughter, P = parent, C = child. Bh. = Bhaktapur variant; ms = man speaking; ws = woman speaking. Examples: BDH = brother's daughter's husband; msZC = 'a male's sister's child'.

<sup>a</sup> Often the term *pāju bājyā* is preferred for MF, and *pāju baje* for MM.

<sup>b</sup> More usually this relative is *jicā pāju*.

<sup>c</sup> In Bhaktapur all MZ are *māmā*, and in Dhulikhel, simply *mā*.

<sup>d</sup> This is in many places preferred to *cidhimā*, to avoid confusion with the father's second wife (FyW).

<sup>e</sup> Quigley (1984: 177) records the Dhulikhel variant *ilimacā*, which according to Manandhar (1986: s.v.) is obsolete and comes from *ihimacā* (lit. 'wedding-child').

<sup>f</sup> Used on its own like this, the term is characteristic of Maharjans; it is being replaced by Np. *bhāujū*. Sresthacharya (1977: 124) reports that Vajrācāryas in the Kirtipur area use *pībhata* for eBW.

<sup>g</sup> Exceptions are HF (*bāju*), HM (*māju*), HeB (*darbhata*, *darābhata*), and HeZ (*tābhata*, or among Tulādhār *et al.*, *pībhata*). *Bhata* should not be confused with *bhāhta*.

*Other points of usage:* In address, Nepali kin terms are very frequently used instead of more traditional Newari usages. The Np./Hindi terms *jethā*, *mahilā*, *kahilā*, etc. down to *kānchā* for 'oldest', 'second-born', 'third-born', etc. down to 'youngest', are also very widely used; Newari itself has only three such terms, *thakālī*, *dāthimha* ('middle one'), and *kwakālī*, and in many circles these are now considered archaic.

The term *tāpā* is prefixed to *bājyā* etc. to form 'great-grandfather' etc.

The term *sadya* is prefixed to a kin term to make it descriptive, and not classificatory.

The terms *pājuṇī* or *pājukhalaḥ* refer to the MB's household, which has specified ritual roles at life-cycle rituals.

A woman refers to her natal home as *thaḥchē* (lit. 'own home') and to her husband's home simply as *chē* or as *bhāhtaṇṭhāy* ('husband's people's place').

Except in Dhulikhel (Quigley 1984) *sasaḥ* is not used by a wife for her husband's kin.

*Sources:* My own observations and data from Lalitpur, plus Toffin (1975a, 1984: 163–73), Sresthacharya (1977), Quigley (1984: 175–82), and Levy (1990: 630–4); all these published sources should be consulted for further minor variations.

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